PART II

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY
(1800-1880)

3

NOT TO RELY ON FORTIFICATIONS BUT ON MEN AND STEEL (1800-1812)

The miniscule American Army, given only shaky foundations in the 1790s, deteriorated through the first years of the 19th century. During the administration of Thomas Jefferson the cause of the decline can be traced partly to the president's well-established faith in the militia as the foundation of national defense and more generally to his indifference as an administrator. The Army simply was not one of Jefferson's central concerns, and its services of supply reflected presidential neglect.[1]

But the Militia Act of 1792 proved unenforceable, and the growing threat of war with Britain repeatedly forced the Army onto Jefferson's reluctant attention. Immediately after taking office in 1801 the president persuaded Congress to reduce the authorized strength of the Army to 3,040 officers and men--what he regarded as the minimum required to police the frontier and guard the arsenals. By the end of the year its strength stood at 248 officers, nine cadets, and 3,794 enlisted men in four regiments of infantry, two of artillery and engineers, and two companies of light dragoons. That force exceeded the president's notions of necessity, and by 1805 he had cut it to 2,732 officers and men. But nothing could reduce the burden of transporting supplies, for the troops were stationed at 43 posts, the largest holding 375 men at New Orleans, the next largest 220 at Fort Detroit, and the smallest only three men at Fredericktown, Maryland.[2] Obviously, the cost and difficulty of providing supplies to such a dispersed force would match those of a much larger army.

Perhaps the Army was not really worthy of presidential favor. Its enlisted ranks included a mixture of foreigners and renegades from society, frequently drunken and quick to desert. The officer corps was a national disgrace. The senior officer was the nefarious James Wilkinson, one of the most persistent and treacherous schemers in American history. His subordinates were described by Winfield Scott as "swaggerers, dependents, decayed gentlemen and others fit for nothing else . . . totally unfit for any military purpose whatever."[3] Too many of

them were relics of the Revolution, strongly inclined "to turn the garden patches they cultivated adjacent to the forts into their principal source of livelihood and interest."[4]

If Jefferson had any ambitions for the Army, he desired that it be useful to the nation. To that end, he and Hamilton arranged for the establishment of the academy at West Point in 1802, making it identical with the Corps of Engineers. With that deed they sowed the seeds of future professionalism, but for some years the Army's chief distinction was its dedication to the laborious and unmilitary activities of road building, river clearing, and exploration. To preside over the military establishment, the president appointed as secretary of war Henry Dearborn, a veteran of the Revolution described as a "former gallant young officer [who] was now fifty and a plodding Republican politician, his most salient characteristic a devotion to governmental thrift surpassing Jefferson's and approaching niggardliness."[5]

The job of secretary of war would have intimidated even a more energetic man. From 1798, when procurement authority was returned to the War Department from the Treasury, to 1812, it was generally believed that the small size of the Army made it unnecessary to maintain in peacetime the sort of staff departments that would be required for supply in wartime. So the secretary of war directed all supply activities and served personally as quartermaster general, commissary general, master of ordnance, Indian commissioner, commissioner of pensions, and commissioner of public lands. He bought all supplies, but only after funds had been appropriated by Congress, which required that all procurement be conducted on a yearly basis.[6] For subsistence, Anthony Wayne had urged in the late 1790s "the aboslute necessity of some [more] effectual & certain mode of supplying the Army than that of private Contract," but the contract system continued.[7] The problem was that the system did not, perhaps could not, work with the Army scattered all over a nearly roadless country and lacking any real supply organization worthy of the name. Some officers protested the constant shortages of food, clothing, and shelter and described the living conditions of the men as "inhuman."[8]

For supplies other than subsistence, the secretary had some organization to support him, after a fashion, but because of persistent congressional tinkering and the poor relations between officials in the two departments involved, its effectiveness was limited. The major innovation in low-bid procurement had come in 1799, when Tench Francis, the purveyor of public supplies, had begun to purchase cloth for the government instead of finished uniforms. The purveyor turned the cloth over to the superintendent of military stores, who stored it. The purveyor then contracted to tailors, who drew the cloth from the superintendent, who inspected and accepted the finished product, at which point the purveyor paid for the work.[9]

All procurement and distribution of supplies were concentrated in Philadelphia, where both the purveyor and the superintendent maintained their offices. Besides the clothing manufacture, the government bought blankets, shoes, camp utensils, military stores, equipage, medicines, and hospital stores--and nothing more. The purveyor executed the contracts, and the superintendent stored and distributed the supplies.[10]

The arrangement was clumsy and inefficient, to the detriment of the men. It was aggravated by extraneous factors like the temporary closing of the Army's Philadelphia office by executive decree in 1801 and by the fact that the responsible personnel were usually absent, supervising the transport of supplies in the field.[11] Also a problem was the institution in 1802 of a system of regional military agents (all civilians) as a substitute for a quartermaster staff. The purpose was to reduce transportation costs by allowing the agents and lieutenants at the posts to manage property, keep accounts, and make small purchases. But the local procurement authority was limited to less than $50.00, so purchasing remained centralized in Philadelphia and ever more cumbersome.[12]

Given good will on all sides, it might have been possible to make the system work. But the purveyor and the superintendent could not cooperate, especially when it came to inspections of supplies. Inspection was originally supposed to be the responsibility of the purveyor, but in 1802 Superintendent William Irvine accused the purveyor of dereliction and

instituted inspections of his own. Two years later the secretary of war appointed Irvine to the post of inspector of clothing in addition to his duties as superintendent, although the actual work passed to a clerk. Before long the purveyor and the superintendent had established a tradition of mutual criticism.[13]

New personnel in the key posts aggravated the discord and failed to reform procedures. When Tench Francis died in 1803, he was succeeded by Israel Whelen, who resigned a few months later when he was refused authority to stockpile clothing and other supplies one year in advance in order to ease the administrative burden of annual contracting. Tench Coxe succeeded him as purveyor and tried to obtain authority to stockpile clothing and equipment sufficient to equip 10,000 men in order to eliminate the overordering caused by the annual purchase procedure, but with no more luck than Whelen. The following year, Callender Irvine succeeded his father, William, who had died in office, as superintendent. The relationship between Irvine and Coxe soon deteriorated into an open feud over every issue of procedure and substance. They flatly refused to cooperate.[14]

In 1808 relations between the United States and Great Britain became ominous. At Jefferson's behest Congress tripled the authorized strength of the Army to almost 10,000 men and appropriated money for coastal fortifications and $200,000 for state militias.[15] The effects of the expansion on the procurement system brought matters to a crisis. Domestic cloth of high quality was in short supply; Purveyor Coxe bought the best material available, but much of it was substandard. As a result, Irvine rejected one-quarter to one-third of the garments brought to him for inspection. He ignored the reality of the shortages and suggested that cloth should be sent to the regiments so that army tailors could make the uniforms; the secretary of war disagreed. Irvine blamed Cox for all delays in uniform deliveries, to which charges Coxe responded with recriminations of his own. Despite the secretary of war's attempts at mediation, the feud between the two worsened, and in 1810 Irvine peevishly refused to inspect the uniforms. Secretary Dearborn thereupon returned the inspection authority to the purveyor.[16]

For a time, that seemed to solve the problem of divided authority. It also put Coxe on the course that earned him the title "father of the cotton industry," as he set about to develop domestic sources of cloth. Through an expanded volume of purchases, he could provide considerable encouragement to American millers. During this period he turned increasingly to cotton as a material for blankets and clothing, evidently believing that cotton production could be increased more quickly than that of wool to meet the Army's demands.[17]

As long as the strength of the Army remained far below the authorized 10,000 men--at only 6,744 in early 1812--the procurement of its supplies managed to stagger along. But Coxe by that time was supervising some 5,000 tailors and seamstresses under contract to make uniforms, and doing so with very little staff. When Congress, believing that a show of strength might stave off war with Britain, authorized the enlistment of 30,000 volunteers and expansion of the Regular Army to 25,000 men in 1811, it promised to overwhelm Coxe's system. When the war, and enormous demands for supplies, actually arrived the following year, the military supply apparatus proved utterly unequal to the challenge.[18]

The creaky supply system in place before the War of 1812 was managed with a true spirit of miserliness. It should come as no surprise that the War Department felt no obligation to provide furniture for the comfort of officers and men. As the merest concession to necessity, it provided weapons, clothing, shoes, equipment, and food--and none of them in a dependable fashion. Among those categories could be found the following, which would inevitably make their way into men's quarters: blankets, camp kettles and cooking utensils, and candles (from subsistence rations). In addition, the Army provided straw for sleeping, and probably palliasses to stuff with it.

In fact, the War Department was somewhat dubious about its obligation to provide quarters at all. The first regulations governing barracks, quarters, fuel, and straw were issued in 1801.[19] Although the regulations allotted the numbers of rooms and kitchens to be allowed every officer from commanding general to subaltern, they made no

provision at all for rooms for enlisted men. The rules governing issue of fuel, however, apportioned it "to every room occupied as barracks by eight non-commissioned officers, musicians and privates. . . . " It can be deduced from that that the eight-man room that housed the men of the Continental Army at New Windsor had become the assumed standard. That the men were supposed to sleep in pairs can be drawn from the fact that straw for bedding was issued "for each palliass for two men." It is worth noting that at this early date the Army's civilian managers really had not begun to formulate a policy on either permanent or temporary housing for the men, but rather seem to have ratified the continuation of practices that had been established during the Revolution and probably were regarded as customary for armies in general.

The same grounds exist as in the 1790s for conjectures that the men did or did not build bunks, benches, tables, or other furniture as they built their quarters. Conditions doubtless varied from place to place. It should not be assumed that such items were thought necessary, even in "permanent" quarters. In giving instructions on the construction of such buildings at Fort Detroit in 1805, Secretary Dearborn specified "two barracks, each sixty two feet in length, twenty in width, and one and a half story in heighth; each barrack to be divided into four rooms, exclusive of the half story, which should be occupied for lodging rooms. . . . The walls of the half story should not exceed 3-1/2 feet in heighth."[21] If his instructions were followed, the men at Detroit slept in lofts, and any bunks would have been no more than side boards to contain the straw. The lower rooms were supposed to have each a closet and a fireplace, and therefore were for eating and general day use. It seems a reasonable conjecture that the men would have fitted the rooms out with tables, benches, and stools--but through their own efforts. The only officially provided contents would have been the camp cooking equipment, blankets, palliasses (probably), and candles.

Because the 1801 regulations on straw likely approved rather than established a practice already customary, Dearborn's instructions on the buildings at Detroit may be regarded as the first formulation of War Department policy related to furniture in barracks. But he had already

implied a more general policy of providing the least in the way of housing, let alone furniture, in remarks to the senior general in 1804:

> Being of opinion that for the general defence of our Country we ought not to rely on Fortifications but on men and steel, and that works calculated for resisting batteries of cannon are necessary only for our principal seaposts, I cannot conceive it to be useful or expedient to construct expensive works for our interior military posts, especially such as are intended merely to hold the Indians in check.[22]

Dearborn's suggestion was to build simple log stockades 120 feet on a side, with a pair of blockhouses on opposite corners. With considerable variation, that is essentially how the Army housed itself on the frontier in the early years of the century. It was not an army in quarters but one in the field, like the Continental Army. The men were issued the necessary equipment for field living, nothing more, often less. If they wanted something else for comfort in their hovels, they were left to their own devices, so long as it cost the government nothing.

Notes

1. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 105-07.

2. Ibid., 104; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 104; Millis, Arms and Men, 59.

3. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 107. Wilkinson's shady history is tangential to this subject. Suffice it to say that probably no historian has ever said much in his favor. He was involved in cabals against Washington during the Revolution, in the Newburgh Addresses, in the intrusion of the Pike Expedition into Spanish territory (which he disavowed when it was captured), in Burr's conspiracy to invade Spanish country around the Red River (which he betrayed), in the disaster at Terre aux Boeufs, and possibly in countless other misdeeds during a long and devious career.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 105-07.

6. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 116-17.

7. Quoted in Weigley, History of the United States Army, 108.

8. Ibid., 108-09; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 117-19. The growing number of military posts required a growing number of subsistence contractors to provide and deliver the goods. The result was that few contracts received any supervision.

9. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 122-23.

10. Ibid., 119-20; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 108.

11. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 122-23.

12. Ibid., 129-33.

13. Ibid., 123-24. William Irvine, an Irishman by birth, had been a brigadier general in the Revolution. Appointed superintendent March 13, 1800, he died in that office July 29, 1804. Heitman, Historical Register, 1:564.

14. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 121-25. Callender Irvine, son of William, had served as a captain in the artillery and engineers from 1798 to 1801. He was appointed superintendent October 24, 1804, and on August 8, 1812 to the new position of commissary general of purchases, staying in that job until his death October 9, 1841. Heitman, Historical Register, 1:564.

15. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 109.

16. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 125-27.

17. Ibid.; see also the contracts and related correspondence on cotton blankets, 1808-12, in the file "Blankets" in the Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General (hereafter ROPMG), Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1890, Record Group (RG) 92, National Archives (NA). Hereafter, references to files in the Consolidated Correspondence File will be cited as QMConFile with the name of the file subject: QMConFile--Blankets, RG92.

18. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 145-46; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 111-12, 114-15.

19. Issued April 28, 1801, and reprinted in 1808 regulations, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The 1808 regulations were the first publication of general regulations for the Army after the Revolution; as might be expected, they comprise chiefly a recapitulation of those imposed by Steuben on the Continental Army.

20. Whether the 1801 regulations even applied to the actual situation of the majority of the Army--which was scattered in frontier posts not formally regarded as quarters, but as temporary situations in the field--might be asked, as they are entitled "Regulations to be observed in the allowance of Barracks or Quarters to the Officers of the Army, and in the delivery and distribution of Fuel and Straw to the garrisons on the sea coast and recruiting parties." A later regulation, May 1, 1806, allowed additional fuel north of the 39th parallel.

21. Dearborn to Commanding Officer at Detroit, August 5, 1805, quoted in Francis Paul Prucha, The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), 173-74. Dearborn's tight-fisted attention to petty details characterized his entire tenure at the War Department.

22. Dearborn to Gen. James Wilkinson, June 28, 1804, quoted in ibid., 173.

4

MADNESS IN THE EXTREME

(1812-1818)

When war erupted in 1812, it burst upon an American nation that was decidely pugnacious but, except for a sufficiently empowered central government, no more prepared for military adventure than it had been in 1775. The tiny Regular Army of less than 7,000 men was scattered in small outposts, mostly untrained, and commanded by men of little talent or energy, a mixture of aging relics of the Revolution and well-connected men drawn from civilian life. There were only 71 graduates of West Point available. The administrative apparatus for army supply was insufficient for peacetime and hopelessly inadequate for a continental war.[1]

Congress knew instinctively that it must prepare for war. To do so it drew upon fading recollections of the Revolution, and acted with a combination of meddling and bungling that in retrospect seem incredible. The lawmakers' niggardly preoccupation with minor details knew no limits; on January 11, 1812 they fixed the exact amount of soap and candles to be provided to enlisted men with their rations.[2]

More serious was the legislators' inept and persistent fiddling with the military supply system, which despite the labors of Coxe and Irvine was in a state of collapse. On March 16, 1812 an act of Congress fixing the peacetime military establishment abolished the positions of quartermasters and turned their duties over to yet another system of "military agents" supposed to be directed by the secretary of war.[3] Twelve days later the lawmakers reversed themselves--at least for the war emergency--and established a Quartermaster Department headed by a quartermaster general with the rank of brigadier general, four deputies (with allowance for four more), and as many assistant deputies as would be needed for field operations. The department was divided into eight districts, only four of which (all north of the Potomac) were accountable to the quartermaster general; the others answered to the secretary of war via military commanders. A 56-year-old veteran of the Revolution, Morgan

Lewis, became the first quartermaster general, but he resigned in less than a year.[4]

The legislation creating the Quartermaster Department thoroughly overhauled--and scrambled--the Army's supply system and was based on hazy congressional memories of the Continental Army. Recalling vaguely that Washington enjoyed the services of a commissary general, the legislators established the position of commissary general of purchases under the secretary of war. What the Congress did not understand was that the commissary general of the Continental army oversaw subsistence, not purchasing, and in the event the law made no provision for supplying rations. Throughout the war they were furnished by contractors, each of whom had a district (not the same as the military districts) and was under contract directly to the secretary of war. And despite congressional eagerness to invade Canada, there was no legal provision for furnishing rations to the invasion forces once they crossed the border. "It is madness in the extreme," protested one officer in 1814, "to attempt to carry on war with such a system." Subsistence contractors were not subject to military law, and throughout the war rations arrived too little and too late.[5]

In establishing the position of the commissary general of purchases, Congress abolished that of the purveyor of public supplies and concentrated procurement authority in the War Department. Nobody, it seems, wanted the new job except Tench Coxe, who for political reasons was not offered it. Eventually it went to Callender Irvine, who accepted the position on the condition that he be allowed to remain in Philadelphia. William Duncan succeeded him as superintendent of military stores, also in Philadephia.[6]

The inadvertent mischief of Congress reached even further. The same legislation that established the Quartermaster Department and the office of commissary general of purchases also created an Ordnance Department and a commissary general of ordnance. The authorities of the several offices were vague and apparently overlapping. The quartermaster general was supposed "to purchase military stores, camp equipage and other articles

requisite for the troops." The commissary general of purchases was "to conduct the procuring and providing of all arms, military stores, clothing, and generally all articles of supply requisite for the military service." Neither knew what he was to do. The secretary of war's first attempt, on May 4, 1812, to resolve the confusion by regulation only made it worse. He directed the quartermaster general "to ensure a supply of provisions and a regular distribution thereof to the troops." Quartermaster General Lewis asked, "As the Army is supplied with provisions by contract (the worst of all possible means) what [does the Secretary's regulation] mean[?]" On May 8, the secretary told him to procure supplies necessary for "the accommodation and comfort of the Troops."[7]

The further collapse of the supply system was inevitable. Although Irvine instituted a number of procurement and production improvements--including the cutting of cloth by the government before it went to contract tailors--the production activity remained separated from distribution until the superintendent of military stores came under Irvine's supervision in 1813; for the first year of the war, therefore, Irvine remained as blinded to realities in the field as had Coxe. Lewis toured the posts on the northern frontier in 1812 and found the troops there "destitute" of clothing, arms, and ammunition. Blankets were in persistently short supply in the West. The utterly ineffective supply system eroded morale and contributed significantly to the failure of the Niagara campaign in the first year of the war.[8]

In 1813 Congress tried to repair some of the damage wreaked by its clumsy measures of the previous year. Secretary of War John Armstrong persuaded the legislatures on March 3 to authorize a general staff, including a quartermaster general, to support him in the permanent management of the War Department. The law abolished the position of superintendent of military stores and created a superintendent of military supplies based in Washington. He was a civilian who was to keep accounts of all stores and supplies purchased for the Army volunteer forces and militia and prescribe forms and rules for all officers to whom supplies were entrusted. Assistant commissaries of purchases were also authorized, but compliance with the new procedures was incomplete.[9]

The Quartermaster Department benefited from the reorganization. It now had eight quartermasters general, eight deputy quartermasters general, and 23 assistant deputies. The head of the department was attached to the principal army with the rank of brigadier general. The department retained authorities to employ "masters" for forage, wagons, and barracks and to hire artificers, mechanics, and laborers. Robert Swartout, appointed head of the department in March, had no military experience other than militia service, but that was probably inconsequential. Circumstances, including the condition of the national treasury, made the problem of army supply insoluble. Even the most basic items remained hard to come by, and the quartermasters necessarily devoted most of their energies to the transportation of supplies to armies in the field, employing difficult and expensive methods fairly unchanged from those of the Revolution.[10] Toward the end of the war Congress finally began to consider ending the contract system for subsistence, even introducing a bill for that purpose, but postponed action when the conflict finally came to an end.[11]

The contract system of supplying provisions failed as thoroughly during the last year of the war as it had at the start. And despite Irvine's production reforms, winter clothing usually did not reach the troops until the middle of the cold season. Because of the general lack of clothing, blankets, and shelter, one general asserted that casualties from disease during the war outnumbered those from battle by five to one.[12]

Congress and the War Department did manage, in 1812, to issue new general regulations for the Army.[13] They expanded upon the earlier regulations and to a limited degree revealed the manner in which enlisted men were to be housed during and after the war. To begin with, the Army now acknowledged that the men were to be housed: "To twelve non-commissioned officers, musicians, or privates, one room, or (in the summer) a kitchen."[14] That was a departure from the standard of the eight-man hut born during the Revolution and ratified in 1801, albeit a small one. The Army still lived in tents in the summer and huts in the winter.

Of furnishings for the quarters, "straw for soldiers' bedding" was one of only six categories of articles that quartermasters were allowed to purchase. The others were forage; fuel; stationery; horses, carts, wagons, and boats; and boards, nails, and other materials to build or repair barracks, hospitals, and bridges. Straw was still issued to the men in pairs, although surgeons and commanding officers were allowed discretion to regulate the straw issued for the sick. Palliasses or bedsacks to contain the straw were not mentioned. Officers were made responsbile for keeping the men's quarters clean and in repair when they moved out of them.[15]

Finally, the regulations implied the remaining general-issue contents of barracks by listing the camp equipage detachments were allowed to carry with them, including "one iron kettle, and two tin pans, for every six men," and the congressionally prescribed four pounds of soap and one and one-half pound of candles to every 100 rations.[16]

The actual contents of the winter quarters of the armies during the war probably varied widely and, because of the failures of the supply system, would often come up short even of the items prescribed by the regulations. For instance, in 1813 the secretary of war intervened personally to have the quartermasters correct the deficiencies in erection of huts and provision of wood and straw for the troops assembling at Sackett's Harbor.[17]

On the other hand, some promise of improvement in the future emerged from the war. One, as suggested by the regulation on the cleanliness of quarters, was a growing appreciation of the need for sanitation. When Winfield Scott established the camp of instruction in New York in 1814 to train the army that earned glory at the battles of Chippewa and Lundy's Lane, he included camp and field police and sanitation in his course. Although the men there were housed in tents, the lesson was bound to be applied to the log huts of winter, into which category frontier army posts fell.[18]

In March 1814 Congress tried to abolish the Quartermaster Department as part of the postwar demobilization, but the president retained Swartout and two deputies to supervise government property and pay of claims. Irvine lost all of his deputy commissaries, but gained complete responsibility for procurement. Thereafter, supplies were purchased and concentrated in Philadelphia, with a deputy quartermaster general stationed there to arrange transportation to the field.[19]

These provisional arrangements continued for some time as Congress hastened to dismantle the Army, which in 1815 it cut to an authorized size of 12,383 officers and men in eight regiments of infantry, one rifle regiment, one of light artillery, a Corps of Artillery to man permanent fortifications, and the Corps of Engineers. The secretary of war in the same year asked for a permanent army staff, including a quartermaster general, at army headquarters, but the following year Congress ignored him and authorized only divisional and brigade staffs and continued the existence of the commissary general of purchases. These arrangements lasted another two years.[20]

But Congress' wish to avoid creating a permanent military organization could not withstand the reformist zeal of Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, who took office in 1817. He pushed relentlessly for a sound military establishment, with a system of permanent fortifications and a thoroughly professional army led by the graduates of West Point, an institution he strengthened during his tenure in office. He had other successes as well, although some of them were temporary. The Corps of Engineers received $3 million for construction of seacoast fortifications from 1817 to 1824, but the program slowed thereafter. Unfortunately, the new works went mostly unmanned. Calhoun also obtained authority to erect a line of posts up the Missouri River to its junction with the Yellowstone in 1817, but Congress almost immediately reduced that program for reasons of economy. Nonetheless, by 1818 the number of posts occupied by the Army had grown to 73 (from 27 in 1801 and 43 in 1805).[21]

Perhaps Calhoun's greatest success came in April 1818, when he persuaded the Congress to establish a permanent system of staff departments, based in the War Department and continuing in peacetime. The Quartermaster Department included a quartermaster general with the rank of brigadier general, two deputy and four assistant deputy quartermasters general, and as many others (up to a limit of 12) as would be needed for the conduct of operations. In addition, each regiment and battalion detailed an officer to serve as quartermaster. To the head of what would become a progressively more systematic mechanism for housing, moving, and supplying the Army, Calhoun on May 8, 1818 appointed the 30-year-old Thomas S. Jesup. The "father" of the Quartermaster Corps, as he would be known in later years, stayed in the job 42 years and gave his department the organization it would retain well into the 20th century.[22]

In the same legislation, Congress abolished the contract system of provisioning the Army that had been in effect since 1781, establishing a Subsistence Department headed by a commissary general of subsistence. The new system proved to be much more economical and effective than the old, but it threw a large immediate burden on the Quartermaster Department, which now had to transport rations to the military posts along with other supplies. However, Congress approached this solution in tentative fashion, giving the Subsistence Department only a five-year life; it did not become permanent until 1835.[23]

Although it was to take until the next century to establish a unified procurement and supply system for the Army, at least the new departments had clearly separated duties and were rid of the overlapping authorities of the war years.

As might be expected, the question of furnishings for the quarters of the men claimed little administrative attention during the immediate postwar years, except as the subject had already been addressed in the regulations promulgated in 1812. It is known, however, that the frontier posts gradually came to be better built after the war, with sawn lumber increasingly replacing rough or hewn timbers and puncheons for many

applications.[24] A veteran of the construction of Fort Lookout, Dakota, in 1856 described the procedure that was probably general much earlier: "One of the first things the master-mechanic did was to erect a whip-saw for getting out flooring and roofing boards. This saw was worked by two men, one above and the other below the elevated log. It was slow, laborious work."[25]

The men still provided their own quarters, but they may have begun receiving better tools to do it with. When sawn boards were available for floors and roofing (not by any means universal, even in later years), then they were probably available as well for bunks, benches, and tables. The bunks at least probably were established almost universally after 1817, although they got no official recognition until 1821.

The only other item of furniture that entered the administrative vocabulary during this period was the "bedsack," both double and single, manufactured and so-called by the commissary general of purchases at least before 1817.[26] It was merely the old "palliasse" renamed with characteristically American directness. The straw issued to fill the bedsacks remained governed by the regulations issued in 1808 and 1812.

The administrative machinery was now in place by which the Army could begin to formulate a policy on housing. But for the interim, its only policy would be continued ratification of field practices, and the provision of the barest of necessities so that the men could make themselves a place to sleep.

Notes

1. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 115, offers an excellent summary of the condition of the military establishment at the outbreak of the war.

2. U.S. War Department, Adjutant and Inspector General's Office, Military Laws and Rules and Regulations for the Armies of the United States (Washington: n. pub., 1813), 75 (hereafter cited as 1813 Regulations). The amount prescribed by law was four pounds of soap and one and one-half pound of candles with each lot of 100 rations, and remained unchanged for many years.

3. Ingersoll, History of the War Department, 181.

4. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 136-39.

5. Ibid., 139-41, 142-43; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 119-20. The officer was Lieut. Col. Thomas S. Jesup, later to become quartermaster general.

6. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 139-41. Irvine remained in the job (and in Philadelphia) until his death in 1841. In 1842 his activity was finally absorbed into the Quartermaster Department.

7. Ibid., 141-42; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 112-13.

8. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 146-47, 149, 162, 167, 169.

9. Ibid., 151-52; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 123.

10. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 152-55; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 124.

11. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 143-44.

12. Ibid., 176-77.

13. 1813 Regulations. They took effect in 1812 but were not printed until May 1, 1813.

14. Ibid., 205.

15. Ibid., 203-05, 208-09.

16. Ibid., 75, 209.

17. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 177-78.

18. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 129. Weigley says that the lessons on sanitation were drawn from the Terre aux Boeufs experience, which he describes at pp. 113-14. In April 1809, James Wilkinson was ordered to the vicinity of New Orleans with about 2,000 men, whom he established on low ground within the city. By the middle of the month over a quarter of the force was on sick call from poor camp sanitation, miserable rations, and the vices of the city, while Wilkinson conducted personal business in New Orleans and dallied with his current mistress. The Secretary of War ordered the force to move upriver to higher ground, but when Wilkinson finally did move in June it was to a swamp south of the city, on which the Army had to pay rent, while the inveterate plotter remained in New Orleans. The Secretary finally had to issue a flat order to move upriver, but Wilkinson himself became sick and delayed the move until fall. Meanwhile, he struck a crooked bargain with the subsistence contractor, so that rotten food aggravated the effects of the filth and overflowing ditches of the camp. By the end of the ordeal over 1,000 men had been lost, 166 to desertion and the rest to death; about 40 officers resigned or died. It was one of the worst peacetime disasters ever to hit the Army, but it at least started its leaders thinking about hygiene. But not even that sorry episode could bring the Army to get rid of Wilkinson; the old "traitor, liar, and scoundrel," as Winfield

Scott was once court-martialed for calling him in public, gained an honorable discharge in 1815. Heitman, Historical Register, 1:1037.

19. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 177-78.

20. Ibid., 178-79; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 139; Heitman, Historical Register, 2:578-79.

21. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 133-34, 143, 144-53, 158-59, 163-64.

22. Ibid., 133-35; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 181-82; Ingersoll, History of the War Department, 182. Jesup, a Virginian who later moved to Ohio, joined the Army as a second lieutenant of infantry in 1808. He had risen to the rank of major by April 1813 and became a lieutenant colonel in 1817. Promoted to colonel the following year, he served briefly as adjutant general before assuming the Quartermaster Department post, with the rank of brigadier general. He was one of the heroes of Chippewa and Niagara and earned three brevets during his career. He died in office June 10, 1860. Heitman, Historical Register, 1:573.

23. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 182, 202-04.

24. Prucha, Sword of the Republic, 175. Actually, sawn lumber had been used since the Revolution for floors, roofs, and bunks, but how widely is impossible to say.

25. Augustus Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, U. S. Army (New York: Stirling Press, 1914), 117.

26. Annual Report of the Commissary General of Purchases, 1822 (hereafter ARComGenPur 1822), Military Affairs Document 235 (Mil. Aff. Doc. 235), 17th Congress, 2nd Session (17 Cong. 2 Sess.), American State Papers, vol. 17 (ASP 17). Irvine reported that single bedsacks cost $2.50 in 1817 and $2.20 in 1822, and double bedsacks $2.57 apiece in 1822. "No double bedsacks [were] made in 1817," he added. It is likely

that he was producing them before that year. In the same report he gave the price of wool blankets--cotton ones appear to have vanished along with Tench Coxe--as $2.90 in 1817 and $2.70 for 1822 and 1823. "The last contract price for domestic blankets was $2.90; since which, blankets have been procured at $2.70, of the best quality." Before the appearance here of the term "bedsack," the men's sleeping accommodations had been termed "palliasses," mentioned in the 1801 regulation. But it should be pointed out that DAE and DAHP both report written use of "bedsack" in 1811 and 1814.

5

MATERIALS SHALL BE FURNISHED AT THE PUBLIC EXPENSE (1819-1838)

Jesup set about immediately to organize his new department and reform its procedures. In 1819 he faced his first major duty, that of providing logistical support--transportation, supply, and construction of winter quarters--for two major expeditions into Indian country. The department transported and succored the expeditions with steamboats engaged under contract, and the costs quickly got out of hand, greatly exceeding appropriations. From that year forward for decades, the principal responsibility of the Quartermaster Department would be to provide transportation to an army always on the move, in the process attempting to estimate its cost almost two years in advance. The job was almost impossible, and it left precious little resource for the department's other responsibilities.[1]

Those other responsibilities included the construction of posts on the frontier. The procedures followed reached back to the origins of the Army and reflected the established attitude that frontier posts fell into the same category as winter quarters in a campaign. The troops felled trees, provided the lumber, and built the posts. The quartermasters furnished nails and tools and such technical direction as their abilities allowed. That stopped in 1820 when Congress halted construction on the frontier as an economy measure. But ultimately that deed aggravated the larger problem, for nearly all the posts soon fell into decrepitude.[2] During the same year the War Department directed the Corps of Engineers to erect the barracks, quarters, and storehouses at the coastal fortifications, charging the costs to the appropriations made for the defensive works and further reducing the Quartermaster Department's attention to barracks and quarters.[3]

The official inattention to housing threw an enormous nonmilitary labor burden upon the troops, who in the circumstances often could build only the most rudimentary kinds of buildings. The primitive structures,

almost universally of wood, demanded constant repair or reconstruction--again with the cost paid from the sweat of the men instead of the public purse. "The ax, pick, saw & trowel," an officer complained, "has become more the implement of the American soldier than the cannon, musket, or sword."[4] But even the labor available for repair was limited by the fact that much of the Army was engaged continually in the construction of roads in the wilderness or tending its large gardens.

In 1821 Congress rejected Secretary of War Calhoun's plan for an "expansible" army and to save money reduced the existing force by more than half, from over 12,000 officers and men to 6,126 (authorized; actual strength was usually less). The same law also reduced the staff departments, cutting the Quartermaster Department roster severely while at the same time increasing its responsibilities. Nor was Congress' penchant for tinkering with supply wholly at rest; despite its clear definition of the departments in 1818, the legislature now introduced administrative overlaps between the Quartermaster and Subsistence Departments. The quartermasters got no relief until 1826.[5]

But in the same legislation Congress adopted for the government of the army its first really comprehensive set of regulations, compiled by Winfield Scott.[6] Those regulations reflected a more comprehensive approach to the management of army life and increasing concern for the well-being of the soldier. As an example of the broadened awareness, they mandated a minimum standard of cleanliness in fact as well as appearance. Not only were uniforms to be kept clean and neat in appearance but underwear was to be changed three times a week in midsummer and twice (Sundays and Thursdays) the rest of the year. The men were to wash their hands and faces daily after fatigue, "shave themselves (if necessary), and brush or comb their heads . . . ."[7]

As regards quarters and their contents, it is doubtful that the 1821 regulations established any new practices; rather they further ratified or amended established customs. In doing so, they made an important distinction between garrisions and "other troops in quarters," who were defined as "troops in barracks, or cantonments"--in other words, those

not in permanent fortifications on the seacoasts.[8] Both groups, however, were to follow the same procedures to the extent possible.

Certain items of furniture and finish made their appearance in the 1821 regulations. The men officially now were supposed to have bunks, to which their names were to be affixed, and arm racks, since the arms and accoutrements were to be placed in them in a certain fashion. The bunks had shelves as well, an upper and a lower (the latter the sleeping level) for display of knapsacks and hats. There were pegs for belts and swords in the barracks (if the regulations were followed) and other pegs for shoes; the latter were on the bunks, as the shoes were to be "hung on a peg over the bolster." That bolster was probably the bedsack issued in the army, but the words "bedsack" and "palliasse" did not appear. Finally, the regulations said that there should be closets or recesses for cooking and table utensils, shelves for bread, and hooks out the back windows for meat and that firewood should be put in boxes near the fireplaces. To keep all in order, Saturdays were set aside for the overhaul of bunks and bedding and the cleaning of floors, tables, benches, and military hardware.[9]

The regulations also spelled out in some detail the duties of quartermasters, including the supervision of barracks and quarters. However, "no permanent barracks or quarters . . . [were to] be erected at the expense of the United States, but by order of the Secretary of War."[10] The quartermasters now allotted fuel to the men in groups of six (it had been 12 in 1812), and once again straw was issued to the men in pairs: one 18-pound truss (half the previous allowance) at the start of the month, with a refreshment of four more pounds after 15 days.[11] Every group of six men received among their camp and garrison equipage one iron kettle, two tin pans, and one hatchet, although instead of kettles "iron pots may be furnished to troops in garrison."[12] But no longer was crating to be freely used: "All casks and boxes, in which clothing, camp equipage, and other stores may be received, shall be carefully preserved and returned to the quartermaster, who shall cause them to be sold, and account for the proceeds in his next quarterly account.[13]

The Army evidently felt that it had given enough attention to the comforts of the men in 1821, as it made no change in the apposite sections when new general regulations were issued in 1825,[14] except to increase the fuel allowance for officers (but not for the men).

The quartermaster general had other things on his mind. After a jurisdictional dispute with Irvine, in 1824 Jesup instituted a system of accountability for clothing and equipment issued to the troops; it became a matter of law in 1826 and remained essentially unchanged until World War I. His reform regularized the distribution of general issues and required keeping a record on each soldier. But the bureaucratic squabble persisted. In 1821 the Quartermaster Department had gained the duty of preparing the annual clothing estimates; but in 1832 Congress established a Clothing Bureau, removing the responsibility from both the Quartermaster Department and the Purchasing Department. That curious arrangement persisted until 1840, when the Clothing Bureau went out of existence. Procurement responsibility for all items except subsistence and ordnance finally merged into the Quartermaster Department in 1842.[15]

"The duties of the officers of this department," Jesup reported, "relate principally to the movement and quartering of the troops, the purchase, preservation, and distribution of public property, the erecting of barracks, storehouses, hospitals &c., and the survey and construction of military roads."[16] It was a tall order; road building in particular had become such a major responsibility that in 1825 the quartermaster general devoted virtually his entire annual report to the subject, not even mentioning quarters and scarcely touching on any other matter.[17]

In fact, for some years the department gave little attention in its daily operations to housing the soldiers. The troops, Jesup told an officer in 1827, were expected to be able to "cover themselves comfortably wheresoever timber is to be found."[18] But although the Army followed that rule for much of its history, it gave precious little guidance to the troops. Specific instructions for buildings, let alone furniture, were not forthcoming. That was not because they were not wanted or requested. "To the same expression, different readings will be given," Inspector

General Col. George Croghan wrote from Fort Snelling, Minnesota, in 1826, "however correctly and precisely they may be worded. To obviate all this and to insure exact uniformity it is necessary that correct drawings of both bunks and arms racks, exhibiting their forms, position with relation to the chamber, mode of numbering, etc., be furnished to each post."[19] But all the evidence shows that his plea was ignored. The details of furniture construction varied greatly from place to place, depending upon the skills and the whims of officers and men, with the exception of general issue objects like blankets and kettles.[20]

But the subject of the Army's housing could not be ignored indefinitely. The moratorium on construction imposed by Congress in 1820 within five years left the physical plant at many posts on the verge of collapse. The Quartermaster Department made a survey in 1825 of all military posts in order to support its request for a renewal of construction appropriations. Unfortunately for those who want details, the descriptions were in very general terms, stressing the need for improvement. One point stands out. Apparently the way the Army laid floors (or washed them) caused them to deteriorate quickly. The survey report repeatedly referred to the sorry state of the floors at post after post, even in buildings otherwise described as in excellent condition. Where the report did not condemn the flooring, it said that it had been "recently repaired." The Army's habit of washing the floors weekly doomed even those built on joists. But from what is known about general construction practices in the early years, the report would support the inference that some army floors were composed of puncheons or slabs laid directly on the ground.[21]

As a result of the widespread deterioration, the Quartermaster Department was allowed to resume making repairs and building new barracks in 1825. The administrative procedure was for the quartermaster general to make an estimate of costs, after which Congress would appropriate money for approved projects--each requiring a separate accounting. In the field, the quartermasters supervised troop labor, requisitioned tools and materials, and submitted accounts of all expenditures. If troop labor was unavailable, the Quartermaster Department hired civilian laborers, funds permitting. The structures erected remained simple, sometimes primitive,

and predominantly of wood, except where plans dictated permanent construction. Stone and brick construction was authorized in 1826 for Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, for instance, because it would house the infantry school.[22]

In 1833 the quartermaster general for the first time addressed furniture in specific terms. That year he asked that his department be allowed to construct or provide simple furniture for officers' quarters, including among his reasons the question of simple fairness, since the Navy provided furniture for its officers. Although that issue was raised repeatedly over many decades, Congress never went along with the idea.[23]

But the thought of furniture must have remained in someone's mind, for when new general regulations were issued in 1835,[24] the Army for the first time in its history said specifically that it would provide furniture for the use of enlisted men, whose well-being (and high desertion rate) had attracted growing attention at headquarters. In basic outline, the 1835 regulations pertinent to furniture and barracks maintenance remained essentially the same as before, albeit somewhat more concise. The major amendment was that the day for policing the barracks was changed to Friday. There were also some important additions, including a requirement that a soldier receive one blanket in the first year of his three-year enlistment, another in the second, but none in the third.[25] The most interesting new entry was the first definite statement of policy on providing furniture for enlisted personnel:

> Materials shall be furnished at the public expense for bunks, benches, and tables, for soldiers' barracks, and hospitals, which shall be made under the direction of the officers of the Quarter Master's Department, by artificers drawn from the companies. These articles shall be considered as fixtures, and shall bear the numbers of the rooms for which they are provided, and shall not be removed, except by the authority of the officers of the Quarter Master's Department of the respective posts. Commanding officers of companies, and

attending Surgeons, will receipt and be held accountable for them.[26]

As evidence of the Army's concern (such as it was) for the comfort of the men, to the straw allowance (still 18 pounds, with refreshment, for two men) was appended a warning: "Straw is not a personal allowance or emolument--it is furnished to secure the health and comfort of the soldiers, and is not, on any account, to be sold for their benefit; if not used by those for whom it is provided, as bedding, it is to be returned to the Quarter Master's Department."[27]

Finally, the previous recommendations on cleanliness were strengthened somewhat, although not yet cast as requirements; bathing was "recommended," although the feet were to be washed twice a week.[28] Provisions like that reflected the growing influence of army surgeons, who were becoming increasingly sophisticated about the connection between sanitation and health.

Although the 1835 general regulations had broached the subject, clearly some more comprehensive policy on the construction of barracks and other buildings was required. The absence of central guidance meant that construction (and expenditures) were uncontrolled, and in the event of army expansion they could get entirely out of hand. For the moment, with the actual strength of the Army at 7,000 men and its budget held down, that threat seemed distant. But the Seminole War brought on a tremendous strain, drawing a quarter of the total strength to Florida immediately, eventually causing the erection of a large number of posts in the war zone. Perhaps most important, that conflict demonstrated that the peacetime military establishment was far too small to meet the nation's needs, even without the threat of war from abroad. In 1838, Congress raised the Army's authorized strength to 12,539 men.[29] The need for housing ballooned overnight.

The Quartermaster Department went to work immediately to establish a policy, and by the end of the year the secretary of war, Joel R. Poinsett, could announce with evident satisfaction that his department had

adopted regulations to govern the construction of buildings by the Army "so as to avoid all unnecessary extravagance, and at the same time secure solidity, uniformity, and durability."[30]

The regulations, issued November 24, 1838 over Poinsett's signature, were eight in number.[31] They specified materials ("none but the best kind shall enter into the construction"), workmanship ("plain, workman-like, and free from all ornament not necessary to a neat finish"), doors and shutters, roofs (of "durable and incombustible substances"), piazzas, stairs, interior work (including " the floors tongued and grooved," walls plastered, and "wood work painted," among other details), and finally stipulated that "no Building will hereafter be erected or repaired, or additions be made, under any of the Departments, but in fulfillment of plans and estimates previously submitted and approved by the Secretary of War."[32]

Those regulations were very broad, gave few details, and made no mention at all of such things as furniture. Futhermore, they applied to the "construction of the permanent public buildings hereafter to be erected . . . ." Those were something the Army built very few of. Only by indirection could it be said that the new rules governed the vast majority of military posts, scattered across the frontier and not regarded as "permanent." For them the old policy of tents in summer and huts in winter was still in force; budgets were too small to allow anything else, even where the "winters" lasted year-round, year after year.

The typical soldier of 1838 lived in conditions that were little better than those of a generation earlier, and that would not have been at all unfamiliar to a veteran of the Continental Army. The new regulations expressed an ideal, and in them lay hope for the common soldier. As a foundation for more comprehensive policies in the future, they raised at last a real possibility that the living conditions of the men might improve.

Notes

1. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 188-93, 204-09.

2. Ibid., 210.

3. Ibid. In 1824 this was modified by making the Quartermaster Department responsible "for construction and repair of all storehouses and sheds necessary to secure and preserve public property at Fortifications."

4. Zachary Taylor to Jesup, Sept. 18, 1820, quoted in Prucha, Sword of the Republic, 169.

5. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 195-97; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 142; Heitman, Historical Register, 2:580-81.

6. U. S. War Department, General Regulations for the Army; or, Military Institutes (Philadelphia: M. Carey & Sons, 1821), cited hereafter as 1821 Regulations.

7. Ibid., 47-78.

8. Ibid., 68.

9. Ibid., 68-70.

10. Ibid., 182.

11. Ibid., 188, 194.

12. Ibid., 194-95.

13. Ibid., 196.

14. U. S. War Department, General Regulations for the Army; or, Military Institutes. Revised by Major-General Scott (Washington: Davis & Force, 1825), cited hereafter as 1825 Regulations.

15. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 199; Ingersoll, History of the War Department, 185-86.

16. Annual Report of the Quartermaster General, 1828 (ARQMG 1828), Mil. Aff. Doc. 390, 20 Cong. 2 Sess., ASP 19.

17. ARQMG 1825, Mil. Aff. Doc. 284, 19 Cong. 1 Sess., ASP 18.

18. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 210.

19. Quoted in Burton K. Kummerow and William L. Brown III, The Enlisted Barracks at Fort Snelling: A Study of Military Furnishings in the 1820s (Jessup, Md.: Historic Reproductions, 1972), 12. Mr. Brown graciously provided a copy of this report.

20. In these cases the Purchasing Department wrote the specifications in its contracts to suppliers. By 1831 (and probably much earlier) kettles were issued in nests of three, along with mess pans and mess cans. A typical specification is offered in Irvine to Robert Dingee, Feb. 5, 1831, quoted in ibid., 24. The prices paid for blankets, but not the specifications, are discussed with other clothing items in ARComGenPur every year. In 1828, 1829, and 1830 the price was $2.50 a pair; in 1831, $2.45; in 1832, $3.00; in 1833, $2.87-1/2; in 1834 through 1838, $3.00. ARComGenPur 1829, Mil. Aff. Doc. 410, 21 Cong. 1 Sess., ASP 19; 1830, Mil. Aff. Doc. 458, 21 Cong. 2 Sess., ASP 19; 1831, Mil. Aff. Doc. 485, 22 Cong. 1 Sess., ASP 19; 1833, Mil. Aff. Doc. 551, 23 Cong. 1 Sess., ASP 20; 1834, Mil. Aff. Doc. 585, 23 Cong. 2 Sess., ASP 20; 1835, Mil. Aff. Doc. 613, 24 Cong. 1 Sess., ASP 20; 1836, Mil. Aff. Doc. 699, 24 Cong. 2 Sess., ASP 21; 1837, Mil. Aff. Doc. 745, 25 Cong. 2 Sess., ASP 22.

21. "State of Barracks, Quarters &c. occupied by the troops, or in charge of the Quartermasters Department, April 1825," ROQMG, Miscellaneous Records Relating to Reservations and to Buildings, 1819-1865, RG92, NA. A written use of the Americanism "puncheon" offered in OED and dated 1805 reads as follows: "A floor of puncheon or split plank were laid, and covered with grass and clay." Such flooring (where there was any but dirt) was typical of pioneer construction and probably of the Army's as well, although some posts built before 1820 did have proper floors built on joists. Dirt floors became more common after 1825.

22. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 210-11. Without a special appropriation the department was not allowed to build at all, so at many posts the men occupied "temporary" quarters primitive in the extreme. See for example the case of Fort Crawford in ARQMG 1827, Mil. Aff. Doc. 360, 20 Cong. 1 Sess., ASP 19.

23. ARQMG 1833, Mil. Aff. Doc. 551, 23 Cong. 1 Sess., ASP 20.

24. U. S. War Department, General Regulations for the Army of the United States; Also, the Rules and Articles of War, and Extracts from Laws Relating to Them (Washington: Published by Authority of the War Department, 1835), cited hereafter as 1835 Regulations.

25. Ibid., 209.

26. Ibid., 147.

27. Ibid., 152.

28. Ibid., 13.

29. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 161-62; Heitman, Historical Register, 2:584-89, 626. Actual strength did not exceed 11,000 until 1847 and was usually around 10,000 during the Seminole War.

30. Annual report of the Secretary of War, 1838 (ARSecWar 1838), Senate (Sen.) Doc. 1, 25 Cong. 1 Sess., 105.

31. "Rules and Regulations for insuring uniformity and a due economy in the construction of the permanent public buildings hereafter to be erected for the use of the quartermaster's Engineer, Ordnance, and all other departments of the army," signed Nov. 24, 1838, and promulgated in General Order No. 51, Nov. 28, 1838, Records of the Adjutant General's Office (RAGO), Orders and Circulars 1797-1910 (Orders and Circulars), RG94, NA; cited hereafter as Building Regulations 1838.

32. Ibid. The regulations applied to the Quartermaster, Engineer, Ordnance, "and all other departments of the army."

6

THE WORST LODGED ARMY IN CHRISTENDOM

(1839-1860)

"Perfectly isolated as these outposts are . . . the soldier [must] kill the hours of a tedious solitude, and beguile away the loneliness of his situation."[1] So said a British visitor, observing life at the frontier stations of the United States Army in the 1840s. To the soldier in such places, the sense of isolation must have been reinforced by a belief that no one cared about the squalor in which he usually lived. Before 1840, that was very nearly the case among those who governed the Army from Washington.

During the Army's first half-century and more, the creature comforts of the enlisted man recieved only incidental attention in the administration of the military establishment. Regulations and procedures touching upon the subject were intended not so much for the benefit of the soldier but to control the government expenditures. How the military hierarchy's thinking typically worked is reflected in the way the Army heated barracks and quarters. That was to be done by open fireplaces, which could be built by the men at little cost, and wood was usually provided by the labor of the troops. But by the early 1830s wood was becoming scarce even around many frontier posts, and especially along the East Coast, forcing the quartermasters to spend growing sums of public money to buy and transport firewood. In addition, open fires in the mostly wooden structures housing the men were hazardous--and it cost some money to replace even the rudest building after it burned down, not to mention the clothing and equipment it might contain.

Accordingly, and strictly as an experimental economy measure, in 1831 the secretary of war authorized the quartermaster general to procure six anthracite coal grates for the hospital at Fort Monroe, Virginia, and six more for officers' quarters there. In the next few years Franklin stoves began to come into wider use throughout the Army, not for the comfort of the men, but because they consumed less wood than fireplaces and therefore reduced expenses.[2]

For a long time the Army avoided establishing any policy on stoves more formal than simple expediency. Nonetheless, stoves themselves gradually began to account for an increasing share of quartermaster expenditures, and in 1844 Jesup predicted that the problem could not be ignored indefinitely, as the expense of providing fuel and timber for the western posts would increase as deforestation proceeded.[3] Thirteen years later he tried unsuccessfully to establish a general policy on the distribution of stoves, when he requested an appropriation

> . . . of twenty thousand dollars to provide stoves for the quarters of officers and soldiers, not exceeding two to each officer above the rank of captain, and one to each captain and subaltern, and four to each company of soldiers above 40° of north latitude, and two to each company below that latitude . . . . There has never been an appropriation for either stoves or . . . though the former are really necessary in the winter-season in all the northern and northwestern portions of our country, and are often necessary in the western and southern portions of it.[4]

But until the 1870s the distribution of stoves remained unregulated and may or may not have followed Jesup's proposed formula. At a great many of the posts, especially on the frontier, fireplaces continued in use for years to come.

Although economy was the most important determinant of the quality of the soldier's housing, by 1840 some attention to his individual well-being surfaced among the leadership. Perhaps the most important influence was Secretary of War Poinsett,[5] who toured the military establishments of Europe that year and returned with the observation that the American Army was "the best paid, the best fed, the best clothed, and the worst lodged army in Christendom."[6]

Poinsett was not the only American military tourist in Europe that year. The Ordnance Board members visited arsenals and military facilities all over the continent and were especially impressed by a new Prussian army

barrack in Berlin that accommodated 1,000 men. "The basement," they reported, "contains cook and mess-rooms; furnaces, each of which heats five rooms above, and offices; the first floor and the second, lodging-rooms, with iron bedsteads; and the attic, company clothing-rooms."[7] The board's report, at the insistence of the secretary of war, was circulated among the War Department hierarchy to provide lessons for the improvement of the American Army.

Poinsett was concerned particularly with the quality of the Army's quarters--not just the buildings that housed the troops but the beds on which they slept. In recommending to the president and the Congress that frontier posts ought to be built of fireproof materials and on a standard, defensible plan, he added, "The quarters for the men ought, likewise, to be built of durable materials, and be permanently furnished with single iron bedsteads, in lieu of the double and treble wooden bunks now in use. This change, for obvious reasons, should be introduced into all the barracks in the United States."[8]

Poinsett thereby launched the Army on its first search for an iron bedstead for its soldiers. But the congressional habit of pinch-penny economy intervened and almost prevented the search from starting. At the official end of the Seminole War in 1842, the legislators reduced the authorized size of the Army from over 12,000 to 8,613 officers and men. They thereafter held down appropriations so sternly that no repairs of barracks or other buildings, except emergency preservation measures, could be ordered during fiscal year 1844.[9]

Throughout the 1840s the troops continued to throw together their own rude housing. Even at the major seacoast fortifications there was inadequate accommodation for the men. Those works were built by the Corps of Engineers, which was also supposed to erect appurtenant facilities but evidently decided that barracks and hospitals should be omitted for two reasons that other departments of the Army regarded as spurious. The engineers believed that such buildings would compromise the military appearance of the fortifications and could also block some of the guns in the event of war.

In 1843 the leaders of the Army fell into a public wrangle over that issue. The commanding general, Winfield Scott, complained of an "extreme want" of barracks and hospitals at the permanent forts and objected to the fact that "cramped and most unwholesome casemates now [were] in general use for both purposes." "[I]t would seem against the interest of the country and the credit of the Government," he averred, "to lodge troops, with their sick . . . in such miserable places." In requesting money to build quarters at the forts and to repair the barracks at inland posts, he echoed the outrage of the surgeon general, who said he could see no good reason why barracks and hospitals could not be built at the seacoast works to remove the men and the sick from the casemates. Reviewing the appalling living conditions at places like Fort Morgan, Alabama, and Fort Pickens, Florida, Quartermaster General Jesup apparently felt that the allegations of the other officers were directed at his department. He turned instead on the Corps of Engineers, whom he rebuked for not providing barracks and hospitals at places under their purview.[10]

But the complaints of the Army's leaders came to naught in the face of unrelenting congressional stinginess. Eventually, almost everything was in short supply. The annual budget requests of all departments went only partly answered, and a penurious spirit pervaded the Army. In 1845 an inspector general maintained flatly "that no frontier post established for a temporary purpose or for occupancy not to exceed six or seven years ought to cost more than five hundred dollars," and on that principle he excused living conditions that he regarded as atrocious.[12]

The Army's supply system recieved its last major organizational changes in 1840, when the Clothing Bureau was folded into the Purchasing Department, and in 1842, when the latter was absorbed by the Quartermaster Department. Everything related to clothing, camp and garrison equipage, and other supplies except ordnance and subsistence was finally under the direction of one authority in Washington, although much of the overhead remained in Philadelphia under a quartermaster officer.[12]

The Philadelphia facilities were the chief source of central issue items in any way related to furniture. Their reports during the period reflected the fact that the soldiers still slept in pairs. For instance, in 1838-39, The Clothing Establishment there manufactured 1,693 double bedsacks, as against 252 singles. During the same period the Philadelphia offices procured 2,022 blankets and experimented with a variety of ways of holding down the costs of all items to be supplied to the troops.[13]

In 1841 the Army issued another revision of the general regulations.[14] As related to the interiors of barracks, they remained essentially as before, except that the day appointed for the weekly cleaning was changed back to Saturday.[15] The suggestion that the men be made to bathe became somewhat more terse but also more insistent.[16] The 1841 regulations affecting quarters were repeated without important change (in fact, regulations governing the staff departments were simply continued in force) in the next revision in 1847,[17] when the Army was engaged in the Mexican War.

In 1843 Jesup renewed his request that his department be allowed to provide "plain furniture . . . at the public expense" for officers. He suggested that such a provision would allow them to change locations more quickly when ordered, save them the financial losses caused by hasty sales of furniture before changes of station, and place the Army on an equal standing with the Navy. But he got no further with his case this time than he had before.[18]

Regarding iron bedsteads for enlisted men, it appeared for a while that Jesup might make some progress. Evidently believing that the American army might learn from the European examples that had impressed the secretary of war, in January 1843, at a total cost of $91.58, the Quartermaster Department imported from England 10 iron bedsteads, as follows:

1 Iron Bedstead 2 ft. 3 inches wide by 6 feet 6 inches long
1 Ditto Ditto to [illegible] up

1 Solid Iron Stump Bedstead No. 11 ornamented head rail, ball feet,
6 feet 6 inches long by 2 feet 2 inches wide
5 Similar, each same price
1 Iron Bedstead with foot rail as Sample
1 Ditto Stump to [illegible] up[19]

The following month, bedsteads of the models used in the French Army arrived from Havre, together with one palliasse stuffed with hay, one mattress, quantities of wool and horse hair, four sheets, one coverlet, and one quilt. The bedsteads were described as "1 Iron Bedstead modelled after those of the Military Hospital with Tablettes," and "1 Small Iron Bedstead after those in use at Soldiers Barracks furnished with wood slats." The cost of the entire shipment was $52.92.[20]

These items apparently went to Philadelphia for examination. There may have been other imports as well; in 1844 Assistant Quartermaster General Henry Stanton wrote to Jesup from Philadelphia, enclosing the "statements desired in relation to the Iron Bed Steads recently imported on the public account from Gordeon[?] Paris; and also return you the file of papers connected with the Report of the late Clothing Board. . . ."[21] Unfortunately, the iron bed file closed with that letter, and there is no record of what disposition was made of the imported objects, or what conclusions were drawn from any examination of them.

Nothing for the benefit of the soldiers emerged from the Army's first inquiries into iron bedsteads. The fault lay not alone in the military but also in the fact that appropriations were so severely reduced--and expenditures complicated by endlessly detailed accounting requirements--that the quartermasters did well to erect barracks, let alone fit out their interiors with mass-produced furniture. That the need for better arrangements was real did not seem to impress the Congress. Late in 1844 Secretary of War William Wilkins tried to get the message across: "I cannot omit the opportunity to recommend to Congress to authorize the substitution of the single iron for the double wooden

bedstead . . . [which] would add to the comfort, health, and cleanliness of the soldier."[22] He was ignored.

In any event another war broke out in 1846, and the question of new bedsteads had to await its conclusion. Observing previous experience, it could have been expected that the question would even then have remained unanswered, as Congress predictably would shrink the Army and deny its expensive needs. But that was not to be the case, for the Mexican War transformed the United States into a truly continental nation with continental military obligations that had to be served.

At the start of the war the Army comprised 734 officers and 7,885 men. Its strength grew to 30,476 regulars and 73,532 volunteers during the conflict. As expected, Congress cut the force to 10,763 by 1850. But white Americans were flooding into the newly conquered territories, and their demands for protection from increasingly belligerent native peoples could not be denied for long; by 1855 the authorized strength of the Army stood at 17,867.[23]

The vastness of the new conquests and the urgency of their military needs transformed the Army into a continental police force, stationed mostly at small, scattered outposts. In 1850 there were only 2,109 officers and men at 33 stations east of the Mississippi, as against 6,385 at 67 posts west of that river, not counting others at depots, West Point, recruiting rendezvous, and in transit.[24] At least 32 new posts were established in territories acquired from Mexico before the middle of 1849,[25] and construction and repair budgets exploded despite congressional opposition. In fiscal year 1851 the Quartermaster Department spent $451,000 on construction repairs at posts in the new territories--three times the entire appropriation for barracks and quarters in 1844. The burden was enormous, because shifting frontier needs required frequent changes in the locations of posts, which in turn mandated the erection of only the most temporary structures. They seemed to require constant repair.[26]

During the years immediately after the war the Quartermaster Department budget was utterly out of control. The largest problem was transportation, not only because of the distances involved, but because nearly everything had to be shipped into the new territories. During the middle and late 1850s the Division of the Pacific, where costs were extremely high during the gold rush, annually spent twice what Congress had appropriated. Even as early as 1850 the transporation costs of the Army, which had grown 50 percent in size since 1844, had increased by 1,500 percent. Yet shortages of all essentials were everywhere the rule.[27]

Congressional appropriations never kept pace with realities, and the War Department regularly had to seek supplemental appropriations to cover "arrearages." In 1850, Secretary of War C. M. Conrad stoutly defended the requested Quartermaster Department budget of $4,295,000 (five times the 1844 appropriation) against the inevitable congressional reductions and delivered to the legislators somewhat of a lecture on the facts of life. Predicting that disbursements would reach $5 million by 1852, he pointed out that they routinely exceeded appropriations, something he regarded as administratively dangerous, and urged in the strongest terms that for once the money be appropriated before it was spent.[28]

The cost of transportation by 1850 averaged about $2 million per year.[29] To reduce that, the Army made rigorous calculations of what it had to ship, and the Quartermaster Department seemed for a time to view the entire Army as little more than a collection of things that required transport. The department was therefore less than enamored of the expanding mounted force, not simply because it had to provide horses and feed, but because a dragoon carried more equipment that required shipment than did a foot soldier. The total equipment and arms for a mounted soldier weighed 78 pounds, of which two blankets (one for the horse, the other for the man) accounted for exactly nine pounds.[30]

Everything conceivable was attempted to cut transportation costs. On January 8, 1851, the War Department issued orders to institute large-scale farming at all posts, in order to reduce the need to ship food

and to turn a profit from sales of produce. The abandonment of Forts Kearney and Laramie was proposed solely on the grounds that farming was not believed possible at either location.[31] But the attempt to revive, on a grander scale, the discredited military agriculture of the 1820s never really got off the ground.

As might be expected, little was left in the budgets for barracks and quarters. In 1853 Jesup requested, in very strong terms, increased appropriations to provide "better accommodations than have been provided for [officers and men] heretofore." He asserted that "suitable standards" had been achieved by the Navy and at Marine Corps barracks and arsenals, but not at very many army posts. Once again, his plea went unanswered.[32]

In 1856 a commission of officers was dispatched to observe the war in the Crimea and to visit military establishments in Prussia, Austria, Russia, and Belgium. The deplorable sanitary conditions in the war zone contrasted dramatically with the high quality of barracks and hospitals in the European military posts, and the whole tour only aggravated the American Army's unhappiness about its own shabby physical plant.[33] General Scott vented that frustration the following year when he asserted that the low quality of the quarters provided for the Army was a principal cause "of desertion, disease, and mortality." The men, he said, lived in casemates in the coastal fortifications and on the frontier "either in tents (winter as well as summer) or such miserable bush and mud huts as they have hastily constructed for the moment." But he acknowledged that the problem was only partly soluble, because the constant movement of the frontier of settlement made it inadvisable to establish permanent quarters for the Army.[34]

The fact that most of the Army's manpower and budgets were scattered around the West served only to worsen living conditions for the men in the East. Scott would not let the subject rest, complaining in 1858, "I must also again beg attention to the miserable state of the barracks or quarters at nearly all our permanent fortifications and posts. Health and efficiency as well as comfort must be sacrificed where strict attention is

not given to the lodgings of the men."[35] That same year Congress arbitrarily cut $2 million from an already tight army budget--much to the outrage of the secretary of war. That action all but eliminated any funding for barracks and quarters.[36]

It was in that fiscal climate that the Army tried to house itself. The machinery of reform was in motion but without much monetary fuel. The Surgeon General's Office issued an expanded supply table in 1850,[37] and an even larger one in 1856.[38] In the latter, for the first time iron bedsteads (bedsteads of any kind had not been mentioned in earlier tables) appeared as an item of general issue to all hospitals. They remained on the inventory thereafter.[39]

The army hierarchy did look into the possiblity of general-issue bedsteads during the 1850s. If in the West, where everything had to be shipped in, or at the posts near large cities, bunks and related items were going to have to be purchased rather than fashioned by the troops, then why not turn to iron? As early as 1848 Henry Whiting, the quartermaster officer at New York City, offered the following proposal to the quartermaster general:

> A requisition has been made on me for bunks for one Compy. 1st Arty. and another will shortly be made for two more Com'ys soon expected in this harbor. As I have found by long experience that wooden bunks, however made, are not durable, and that they soon become, even with the best of police, a harbor for vermin, I take this opportunity to recommend a change, feeling confident that it will lead to economy, & that it will contribute greatly to the comfort of the soldier. This change is, to substitute iron bunks for those of wood. I have had inquiries made as to the probable expense of the former. About $50-- is set down as the cost. Once made, they can hardly fail to last many years. Indeed, it would seem that they could not be worn out. As it will be necessary to make some provision for these Comp'ys shortly, I respectfully ask an early reply. Enclosed is a plan of the proposed bunks.[40]

Whiting's pencil-on-brown-paper sketch shows a two-level, four-man iron bunkbed similar to its contemporary wooden counterpart. The corner posts, of cast iron somewhat more than six feet high, were joined together by wrought-iron flat bars, covered with sheet iron, forming the bed sides; the bed bottoms were to be "of Hoop Iron, woven through each other." It was not an elegant creation, but it would have been an improvement over the same thing in wood. Unfortunately, the record of any reply to his letter is lost, and there is no way of confirming whether his model was placed in the barracks around New York in any numbers.

It is known that iron bedsteads came into use, whatever their pattern, in forts around New York during the 1850s. In 1858 the commander of the recruiting depot at Fort Columbus complained that most of his men were sleeping on the floor because all of the iron bedsteads "previously issued" had broken apart. They were made of such light material that they could not bear up in normal barracks use.[41] The junk bunks may have been the remains of Whiting's, making it the first iron bedstead issued to American troops in barracks.

Iron was the wonder material of the mid-19th century. The entire nation, including the Army, seemed to be fascinated with it. That was not only because the depletion of the eastern forests was bringing America's wooden age to an end, but because it seemed that with iron anything could be made, in ways never before possible. It is not surprising, therefore, that the quartermaster general announced in 1850 that iron houses were being shipped to California "to be exposed to a trial of their fitness before others of that material be introduced into the service." They were to be used as barracks and quarters at Tulare Lake if there was no timber there for the troops to build their own cover.[42]

That same year the Army revealed its desired outfit, congressional appropriations permitting, by publishing in detail the annual estimate (budget request) of the Quartermaster Department of the Division of the Pacific for fiscal 1851. The very long list included everything from steamships to castor oil and the following items of furniture and materials related to the interior finish of buildings:

1,000 iron bedsteads, single
75 close stoves, various sizes (absence of brick and lime render these necessary)
50 cooking-stoves, for officers
20 cooking-stoves, for companies
stove-pipe for above
50 common andirons
50 common shovels and tongs
5 dozen office chairs
3,000 pounds white lead, ground in oil
100 pounds lampblack
100 pounds paints; assorted, ground, and in canisters
5 paint-stones
5 mortars and pestles
40 barrels linseed oil
15 barrels linseed oil
15 dozen padlocks, assorted
12 dozen door-locks, assorted
10 dozen iron door-bolts, assorted sizes
50 dozen pairs butt hinges, assorted
300 pairs strap hinges[43]

In view of Congress' desire to hold down expenses, it is unlikely that the Division of the Pacific received all that it wanted that year, and in fact parts of the requisition, including some of the watercraft, were disallowed by the quartermaster general. But at least, the foregoing reflects the general direction of quartermaster aspirations at the time.

The search for an iron bedstead proceeded, but for a time without any apparent system. In 1852 Samuel Whitemarsh of New York corresponded with a quartermaster officer about the improvements he was making in "the bed," including modifications to keep dirt and gravel from accumulating in the posts, and to make them easier to clean out. He added, "We are also getting up the Bed in a light Pattern of Malleable Iron, which will not be too heavy, which when completed we shall be

happy to send you a sample." Just exactly what his beds were like is not known; nothing seems to have come from his proposals.[44]

While the Army approached the subject in fits and starts, an event took place that two decades later would affect the enlisted man's sleeping accommodations in an important way. On January 13, 1852, the Patent Office issued a patent to Henry Jenkins for a process of making metal bed parts through a chilled-iron casting. In the late 1860s he would sell his patent rights to a firm called the Composite Iron Works Company, which would bring it to the Army's attention at coincidentally the right moment.[45]

In 1853 the Marine Corps revived the quartermaster general's interest in iron bedsteads by asking if the Army used them, "and if so, how they answer the purpose & whether they are of Cast or wrought iron."[46] Jesup could give no helpful response, because the Army had no general policy or experience to draw upon. But within a little more than a year after hearing from the Marine Corps, the quartermaster general and the adjutant deneral recommended to the secretary of war the general adoption of single iron bedsteads for use by the Army. On October 23, 1854, Secretary Jefferson Davis replied:

> The proposed change from double wooden bunks to single iron bunks, is approved and will be carried into effect by supplying the iron bunks to the recruiting depots and to new permanent posts which may be established, and substituting them from time to time for such wooden bunks as may become unserviceable at existing posts.[47]

Two months later General Order 22 modified paragraph 974 of the regulations of 1841 "to substitute single iron bedsteads for the wooden bunks prescribed by that paragraph, to be furnished by the Quartermaster's Department."[48] This provision was reflected in the new general regulations issued in 1855 and again, somewhat modified in 1856.[49] Although the provision related to barracks and furniture remained essentially as before, the straw allowance was now regulated by

the man rather than by pairs of men.[50] The regulations also mentioned the furniture rather than just the materials supplied to build barracks. Along with some other adjustments in matters like fuel rations, they introduced standards for keeping mess areas clean, a revised blanket issue, and furniture provided for offices. The regulations were also somewhat more specific on the provision of bedsacks and cooking pots to troops in garrision, and in 1855 "mess pans" made an appearance--five to every 15 foot or 13 mounted soldiers.[51]

Issuing a regulation that the men would get single iron bedsteads was not the same as making it happen. The secretary's instructions made it clear that the conversion would at most be a gradual one, and the failures of Congress to appropriate funds for that purpose made it all but impossible. Then there was the question of just what the army bedstead would be. Other than that it should be of iron and hold only one man, no one seemed to know. In 1856 the surgeons became impatient and added single iron bedsteads to their supply table, evidently putting them into general distribution at hospitals, but without leaving a record of any standard or design.[52] That relieved hospitals of the uncertainties bedeviling the rest of the Army, which had to observe the secretary's clear implication that the bunks were to be placed in "permanent" posts. The Army had few of those, and at those few not many barracks had been provided. Perhaps the provision of iron bedsteads was not to include the majority of the army after all, since most of the troops were stationed outside the permanent posts at temporary locations in the West.

The adoption of an iron bedstead was retarded further by the Army's habitual indecision when it came to adopting new equipment. Rather than develop its own design or even to shop for a commercial product that would meet the need, the Quartermaster Department waited until a salesman walked through the door with a good product at a good price. Typical, therefore, was this report to the quartermaster general in 1856:

> I have received your instructions to report upon the fitness of a portable camp Bedstead, made by F. T. Foster of this city (Philadephia), for Army purposes. Mr. Foster has shown me

> his Bedstead, which he claims is his invention. This is a mistake, as I have seen the same article before, in use in Mexico, where they are common. It is a good and convenient article for an Officer on campaign, or for travellors on the Western plains; being very portable & weighting only about 21 lbs. Its cost is about $3.75/100. This Bedstead, or portable Cot, is not at all adapted for use of troops in barracks or for general Army purposes.[53]

With no standard imposed from above and apparently no suitable commercial product available--and especially with no appropriations to cover the supply of bedsteads for the whole Army--there was no general issue iron bedstead for many years. Such bedsteads as were supplied at coastal fortifications depended upon what the quartermaster in charge could buy or have manufactured in his area, likely without any consistency from region to region.

In an interesting turn of events, the first iron bedstead accepted by the quartermster general for the army as a whole, as opposed to what local quatermasters may have been procuring, came from an unexpected source--within the Army itself. On June 1, 1858, Capt. William B. Johns[54] of the 3rd Infantry secured patent number 20,435 for an "Improvement in Bedsteads." His invention comprised a stout, three-piece wooden bed with headboard, held together with long bolts and wing nuts, supported on iron trestles at both ends; it appeared well suited for barracks use. Even before receiving his patent, Johns set about selling his invention to the Army. Jesup appointed a board of officers to examine the "Johns Bunk," as it came to be called. They offered "the opinion that it [was] superior to any other known to them and recommend[ed] its adoption both on account of it lightness, cheapness and durability." The commanding officer at Fort Columbus, New York (whose men were sleeping on floors), followed suit and urged the immediate adoption of Johns' bedstead. The deputy quartermaster general in charge at Philadelphia was directed to look into the matter of procuring the item for army use. He struck a bargain with Johns whereby the bedsteads would be manufactured under Johns' supervision

by the Architectural Iron Works Company of New York City at a cost initially of $3.70 apiece. For each bunk procured, the Army would pay Johns (through his Washington lawyer) one dollar in royalty, until he had received a total of $7,500, at which point rights to the patent would transfer to the government. The officer in charge felt satisfied with that peculiar arrangement. "The Bunk is simple in its structure," he reported to Jesup, "and will probably answer the purpose, it will if it be properly taken care of by the troops."[55]

Between December 1858 and October 1859, the Army bought 5,191 bunks, all manufactured in New York under Johns' direction; by March 1860 it had paid his lawyer $5,191. The distribution of the bunks is open to some question. Johns maintained in later years that all of them were installed in the fortifications and barracks around New York. In fact, Johns himself, before striking the bargain with the Quartermaster Department, ordered 69 for Fort Columbus and 135 for Fort Wood at $4.00 each.[56] The Philadelphia office also reported distribution of bunks to Fort Monroe, Virginia, as well as more to Forts Columbus and Wood. In January 1859 it reported 480 bunks ready for shipment to Fort Riley, Kansas, and another 85 for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.[57] And it is apparent from the records that an unspecified additional number of bunks, slight modifications of Johns' pattern (for which, accordingly, he received no royalty), were shipped to California.

At first the Army seemed pleased with the Johns bunk, which appeared destined to become the standard for all barracks. In requesting funds for them in his budget for fiscal 1859, Jesup remarked, "The cost of equipage is also increased by the adoption of the iron bedstead, which is preferred by the troops because it is more easily kept clean than the wooden bunk formerly in use."[58] But it was not to be. Congress would not appropriate the necessary money, and reports came in questioning the wisdom of distributing the Johns bunk at all--it was not strong enough to stand up to barracks use.[59] Shortly before the Civil War the Architectural Iron Works Company supplied the quartermaster general with a design for a new wood-and-iron bunk, apparently also designed by Johns, for hospital use; there was a two-story version of the same pattern for barracks use. Neither attracted any interest.[60]

By 1860 war threatened, and the general adoption of iron bedsteads for the Army was postponed once again. That same year the War Department avoided facing up to another question, that of heating the barracks. In fiscal 1860, besides money for rentals and construction or repairs, the Quartermaster Department spent public funds for only three categories of items for barracks and quarters: $192,261.00 on fuel, $10,116.66 on straw, and $6,453.58 on stoves, listing no specificiations for the stoves.[61]

The Army made one last gesture toward improving its quarters in 1860, when it adopted a volume of comprehensive building plans and materials lists, with a detailed set of regulations, for barracks, hospitals, officers' quarters, storehouses, and other construction. They were prepared under the direction of Lieut. Don Carlos Buell in 1858-1860, and printed for the guidance of the Army in 1861--but never distributed. Ten years later an officer of the Surgeon General's Office could find no record, no one who could explain why they were never disseminated, and very few officers who even knew that they existed.[62]

The 1860 barracks regulations were probably not distributed because of the confusion following the election of Abraham Lincoln and the onset of the Civil War. They set an ideal of standardized, high-quality housing for the Army, but it is doubtful that that ideal was ever attained. It is known that the new regulations were not followed in wartime construction, as all buildings erected during the conflict were "temporary" and followed short-term plans developed at the time. The War Department's heart was in the right place, but it had far to go before it actually gave each soldier a decent place to live and a good bed to sleep in.

The year before the Civil War, the Army's strength stood at about 16,000 officers and men. It was more than ever a frontier police force, for only 929 of its numbers were at posts in the Department of the East. Besides those scattered at depots, West Point, recruiting rendezvous, and in transit, 13,143 men were dispersed widely around the Department of the West, Texas, New Mexico, Utah, Oregon, and California.[63] With a strained budget and a small staff, the Quartermaster Department did is

best to provide housing, transport, and basic supplies to the scattered Army. No matter how earnestly it may have wished to give each man his own bed, circumstances did not permit.

The year 1860 was one of transition for the quartermasters as for the nation as a whole. On June 10, the "father" of the Quartermaster Department, Thomas Jesup, died after 42 years as quartermaster general. The following spring his successor, Joseph E. Johnston, went over to the Confederacy.[64] The next four years proved to be as exceptional for the department Jesup created as they were for the nation. They were exceptional as well in the history of the quarters and furniture provided for the enlisted soldiers.

1. Francis Wyse, quoted in C. Robert Kemble, The Image of the Army Officer in America: Background for Current Views (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 60.

2. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 211-12. The Army was feeling pressures of fuel scarcity similar to those affecting the civilian world, especially in the cities, during the first half of the 19th century. Stoves were by far the largest object of the Patent Office's attention before the Mexican War, receiving over 800 patents before 1845 and thousands more rejections. For a good account of the relationship between fuel availability and the shift to stoves, see A. William Hoglund, "Forest Conservation and Stove Inventors, 1789-1850," Forest History 5(Winter 1962):2-8.

3. ARQMG 1844, Sen. Doc. 1, 28 Cong. 2 Sess., 144.

4. Jesup to Secretary of War, Jan. 26, 1857, printed in ARQMG 1876, House Executive Document 1 (H. Ex. Doc. 1), 44 Cong. 2 Sess., pt. 2, p. 269, with the same elisions. Stinginess was the rule in other matters as well. General Order 26, Apr. 23, 1839, directed that every recruit before joining his regiment was to receive a copy of the "Soldier's Book," but the cost was to be deducted from his first month's pay. Orders and Circulars, RG94.

5. It was not the first tour of Europe for Poinsett, whom Weigley, History of the United States Army, 172, calls "altogether the most vigorous and foresighted War Secretary since Calhoun." Born in South Carolina in 1779, educated in Connecticut and England, then in law in America, he had made an extended tour of Europe and western Asia in 1801-08. In 1801 he became a special agent of the United States in Argentina and Chile, where he was involved in supporting the independence movements. In 1815 he returned home to enter politics as a Democrat, serving in the South Carolina legislature and in Congress.

The first U.S. minister to Mexico, 1825-30, he was recalled at the request of the Mexican government because he meddled in local politics. He served as secretary of war in 1837-41 with great distinction and remained a staunch Unionist throughout his life. He is also well-known for introducing the Poinsettia plant into this country. He died in 1851. CDAB, 794..

6. This became a great favorite in the Army. As late as 1867 the Army and Navy Journal quoted it in a statement about the deplorable state of the Army's housing. "Barracks and Quarters," Army and Navy Journal (Mar. 23, 1867):492.

7. AROrdnance Department 1840, Sen. Doc. 1, 26 Cong. 2 Sess., 66.

8. ARSecWar 1840, Sen. Doc. 1, 26 Cong. 2 Sess., 19-20.

9. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 163; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 237-38.

10. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 168; AR Major General Commanding the Army 1843, ARSurGen 1843, and ARQMG 1843, all in Sen. Doc. 1, 28 Cong., 1 Sess. The interdepartmental feud over the quarters at the coastal fortifications continued for many years.

11. George Croghan, in Prucha, Army Life, 53. That accorded with the opinon of Jesup, who in 1839 said, "If it be contemplated to establish posts on the route surveyed between Forts Leavenworth and Snelling, I would recommend that the Ordinary log cabins and block houses of the frontier alone be constructed, and with as little expense as practicable." ARQMG 1839, Sen. Doc. 1, 26 Cong. 1 Sess., 114. Note the use of the term "log cabin" before 1840.

12. ARQMG 1842, Sen. Doc. 1, 27 Cong. 3 Sess., 230; Ingersoll, History of the War Department, 186.

13. ARComGenPur 1838, Sen. Doc. 1, 25 Cong. 2 Sess., 178; 1839, Sen. Doc. 1, 26 Cong. 1 Sess., 269-88, 303; 1840, Sen. Doc. 1, 26 Cong. 2 Sess., 221, 223; 1841, Sen. Doc. 1, 27 Cong. 2 Sess., 237-38. The costs of blankets in 1840, 1841, and 1842 were $3.22, $2.74, and $2.48; of double bedsacks, $1.44-1/2, $1.35, and $.33-7/8; of single bedsacks, the same as doubles. It can be seen that a transition to single beds would almost double the Army's bedsack expenditures. (ARComGenPur usually offers prices for both the last and the next year.)

14. U.S. War Department, General Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1841 (Washington: By authority of the War Department, 1841), cited hereafter as 1841 Regulations.

15. Ibid., 56.

16. Ibid., 15.

17. U. S. War Department, General Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1847 (Washington: By authority of the War Department, 1847), cited hereafter as 1847 Regulations.

18. ARQMG 1843, 75.

19. "Statement of Cost and Charges of ten Iron Bedsteads imported from England . . .," QMConFile--Bed(iron), RG92.

20. "Statement of Cost & Charges of two Iron Bedsteads and furniture . . .," QMConFile--Bed(iron), RG92. The hospital bed cost $17.58-5/12, the barracks bed $6.25-19/30, the bedding ("furniture") $29.07-19/20.

21. Stanton to Jesup, Aug. 26, 1844, QMConFile--Bed(iron). Neither the report nor the statement appears with this badly mangled letter.

22. ARSecWar 1844, Sen. Doc. 1, 28 Cong. 2 Sess., 115.

23. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 182-83, 190; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 301. See appendix N for the complicated formulas used for determining actual strength in the 1850s.

24. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 301.

25. Oliver Lyman Spaulding, The United States Army in War and Peace (New York: Putnam, 1937), 229-30.

26. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 304. This may have been aggravated by the general shift to balloon-frame construction, which with green lumber is less durable than older framing systems.

27. Ibid., 304, 306, 309-17.

28. ARSecWar 1850, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 31 Cong. 2 Sess., pt. 2, pp. 8-9. Of the over $4 million requested, all but $530,247 for the seven old departments of the Army was destined for the four new departments of Oregon, California, New Mexico, and Texas. ARSecWar 1850, 109.

29. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 317.

30. ARQMG 1851, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 32 Cong. 1 Sess., 253.

31. ARSecWar 1851, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 32 Cong. 1 Sess., 108-18, 161, 164-65. Unlike the military farming of the 1820s, this time it was to be conducted on a commercial scale, with produce being sold at a profit. The idea was to attract a civilian population that could eventually supply the Army's needs locally.

32. ARQMG 1853, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., vol. 2, p. 132.

33. ARSecWar 1856, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 34 Cong. 3 Sess., 16.

34. ARCommanding General 1857, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 49.

35. ARCommanding General 1858, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., pt. 2, p. 762.

36. ARSecWar 1859, Sen. Ex. Doc. 2, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., pt. 1, pp. 8-9.

37. U. S. War Department, Regulations for the Medical Department of the Army [1850] (Washington: Surgeon General's Office, 1850), 30-33, cited hereafter as Medical Regulations 1850.

38. U. S. War Department, Regulations for the Medical Department of the Army [1856] (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, 1856), cited hereafter as Medical Regulations 1856.

39. U. S. War Department, Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1857 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857), 249-52, cited hereafter as 1857 Regulations; Regulations for the Medical Department of the Army [1860] (Washington: George W. Bowman, 1860), 17-26, cited hereafter as Medical Regulations 1860; Regulations for the Medical Department of the Army [1861] (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1861), 21-31, cited hereafter as Medical Regulations 1861.

40. Henry Whiting to Jesup, Oct. 23, 1848, QMConFile--Bunks, RG92. See appendix D for the drawing.

41. Capt. D. L. Floyd-Jones to Maj. A. Cady, Aug. 23, 1858, QMConFile--Bunks, RG92.

42. ARQMG 1850, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 31 Cong. 2 Sess., pt. 2, p. 267. The tests must not have been successful, for the subject was never mentioned again.

43. Ibid., 268-74.

44. Samuel Whitemarsh to Maj. G. H. Crossman, Mar. 11, 1851, QMConFile--Bed(iron), RG92. "Malleable" iron is wrought iron.

45. Ira Hutchinson (President, Composite Iron Works Co.) to Montgomery Meigs, Aug. 17, 1871, QMConFile--Bunks, RG92. Jenkins' patent was extended Jan. 13, 1866, after which he sold the rights to Composite.

46. Maj. A. A. Nicholson, USMC, to Jesup, Sept. 9, 1853, QMConFile--Bed(iron), RG92.

47. Adjt. Gen. S. Cooper to Jesup, Nov. 27, 1854, QMConFile--Bed(iron), RG92.

48. General Order 22, Dec. 27, 1854, Orders and Circulars, RG94. Paragraph 974 directed that the Quartermaster Department furnish materials with which the men could make bunks, benches, and tables for barracks and hospitals.

49. U. S. War Department, Regulations for the Army of the United States and for the Quartermaster's Department [1855] (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, 1855), cited hereafter as 1855 Regulations, and 1857 Regulations.

50. 1855 Regulations, 11; 1857 Regulations, 130.

51. 1855 Regulations, 15.

52. Medical Regulations 1856, 19-24.

53. Maj. G. H. Crossman to Jesup, Jan. 10, 1856, QMConFile--Bed(iron), RG92.

54. William B. Johns, a native of Washington, D. C., graduated from West Point in 1840 and was appointed a brevet 2nd lieutenant in the 8th

Infantry in July, then 2nd lieutenant in the 3rd Infantry in November 1840; he was promoted to 1st lieutenant in 1845, and to captain at the end of 1847, meanwhile having earned a brevet promotion at the Battle of Cerro Gordo. Heitman lists him as having been "dropped" from the army Apr. 11, 1861. He died in 1894. Heitman, Historical Register, 1: 574.

55. "Report of a Board of Officers . . . March 31, 1858; " Col. C. W. Thomas to Jesup, Nov. 1, 1858; Capt. D. L. Floyd-Jones to Maj. A. Cady, Aug. 23, 1858; all in QMConFile--Bunks, RG92. This file holds a large volume of material, including drawings, related to the Johns bunk. For additional information, see the endorsements and letters and documents accompanying Johns to M. C. Storrs, May 25, 1875. Johns got into a long dispute with the Quartermaster Department in the 1870s and 1880s over two points. First, he believed that the Army was required by its agreement with him to pay him the full $7,500 even though it had bought fewer than 7,500 bunks; the Army disagreed. Second, he maintained that the very idea of an iron-trestle, wood-bottom bunk was his and that those the Army bought in the 1870s infringed on his patent. He lost that case as well. It was in countering his arguments that the Army compiled the information on the distribution of the Johns bunks and their apparent fragility. See also appendix E on this and Johns' other bunk. He apparently kept designing bedsteads after the Civil War, but there are no illustrations of them in the army records. He had made himself decidedly unwelcome in the Quartermaster General's Office by the mid-1870s.

56. In addition to the information in the previous note, this is reported in Johns to Col. S. Cooper, May 30, 1858, and in Johns to Meigs, received Nov. 13, 1877, QMConFile--Bunks, RG92.

57. C. W. Thomas to Jesup, Jan. 11, 1859, and W. D. Wallen to General Dent, Jan. 11, 1868 (which lists the price of those sent to Wood and Columbus as $3.70 each, those to Monroe $3.45), QMConFile--Bunks, RG92.

58. ARQMG 1858, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., pt. 2, p. 797.

59. See footnote 55, above. The weakness inherent in the design should have been apparent to graduates of West Point, but obviously it was not. The bedstead was prone to twisting and bolt breakage when under stress. Evidently, all those in use around New York had been junked or sold for scrap by the mid-1860s, and during the 1870s officers recalled that the modified Johns bunks shipped to California before the Civil War had failed quickly. Johns repeatedly disassociated himself from the modified bunks and defended the quality of his own in several letters thorugh the 1870s, all in QMConFile--Bunks, RG92. The modifications were made by Capt. D. H. Rucker, a future quartermaster general. They were technical changes relating to the way the parts were joined together. Rucker thought they were strengthening improvements; Johns claimed they weakened the bunks.

60. See appendix E for a drawing. I found no evidence that this bunk went into production.

61. ARQMG 1860, Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 234.

62. U. S. War Department, Regulations Concerning Barracks and Quarters for the Army of the United States, 1860 (Washington: George W. Bowman, 1861), cited hereafter as Barracks Regulations 1860. The medical officer was John S. Billings, whose 1870 report on barracks and hospitals is discussed below. Pertinent drawings and technical data are in appendixes B, C, and M.

63. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 301.

64. Ibid., 332-33.

7

A SAMPLE WOULD, ERE THIS, HAVE BEEN CARRIED TO BOSTON
(1861-1865)

When the Civil War started in 1861, 183 of the Regular Army's 198 companies were dispersed at 79 posts on the frontier.[1] To serve its supply and transportation needs, the Army had an equally dispersed Quartermaster Department of 13 clerks, 37 officers (a quarter of whom went over to the Confederacy), and seven storekeepers--a force that grew to only 184 clerks, 64 officers, and 29 women copyists during the conflict. The organization chiefly served the armies in the field and throughout the war was hampered by political interference, beset by droves of begging would-be contractors, and overloaded with the huge demands of a continental war. But against those challenges, on June 12, 1861, the department came under the leadership of the redoubtable Montgomery C. Meigs, demonstrably the right man for the occasion.[2]

The Army also began the war with a new set of general regulations.[3] Although they reflected some adjustment of details like the ever-changing fuel ration, as regards the contents of barracks they remained essentially as before. They continued to reflect the multiple meanings of the word "furniture": As applied to "mess furniture," it meant plates, cups, spoons, and so on, but "the furniture for each office will be two common desks or tables, six common chairs, one pair common andirons, and shovel and tongs."[4]

The new regulations also modified the ration of candles (an item of subsistence). The formula now was one pound of sperm candles, or one and one-quarter pounds of adamantine candles, or one and one-half pounds of tallow candles to each 100 rations. In additon, "an issue (extra) of ten pounds of sperm candles, or twelve pounds of adamantine candles, or fifteen pounds of tallow candles per month, may be made to the principal guard of each camp or garrison, on the order of the commanding officer . . . . "[5] The regulations also began that year to devote more specific attention to the appearance of such general issue

items as blankets, which were to be "woolen, gray, with letters U. S. in black, four inches long, in the centre; to be seven feet long, and five and a half feet wide, and to weigh five pounds."[6] That was not especially new, but the fact that specifications were becoming subjects of regulation was. That development was to be significant in supply procedures during the war, and it boded well for the future, after the war. A new set of general regulations emerged in basically the same form (apposite to furniture in barracks) in 1863[7]--a volume that for complex reasons remained in force, with only ad hoc revisions, until 1881.

But the demands of wartime procurement and increasing bureaucratic centralism were already producing greater attention at high levels to the details of barracks, their contents, and items of supply. At first, the Quartermaster Department met the opening demands of the war with sample plans and general guidance for things like barracks construction or supply purchases. By 1864 the Quartermaster General's Office was issuing a flurry of standard plans for buildings and contents and precise specifications for bedsacks, blankets, and other supplies. It was all supposed to emerge as a comprehensive quartermaster's manual or handbook, but unfortunately that was never published as a whole.[8]

The manual was intended principally to meet the large wartime need, but it also codified continuing procurement requirements. It came from a greatly reorganized Quartermaster Department, which in 1864 was arrayed by act of Congress into nine divisions, the Sixth Division being "barracks and hospitals."[9] But before the refined organization could come fully into play, the war ended, and the quartermaster general issued the following order on April 29, 1865: "Construction and extension of all barracks, hospitals and other buildings will cease, unless authorized upon special report, which in all cases of necessity should be made immediately by telegraph."[10]

The regulations and drafts of manuals had only a hypothetical relation to realities during the Civil War, because the immediate need was as "temporary" as it was great. Virtually the entire expanded Army, and the vastly greater force of volunteers, was in the field continuously for

four years, so that the provisions of the regulations related to barracks had no bearing on the men's surroundings. Furthermore, the regulations themselves had built-in exceptions that permitted sacrificing standards to expediency. For instance, commanding officers had the authority to reduce the amount of living space supposedly to be given each man if the numbers of officers and men at a post made it necessary to do so.[11]

And although the regulations required that men be issued bedsacks when in garrison, the Army never lost an opportunity to reduce expenses. At the start of the war a quartermaster officer, pointing out the substantial costs of shipping straw for soldier's bedding to Forts Monroe, Taylor, Jefferson, and Pickens, suggested "that those posts be furnished with mattresses filled with corn husk or other cheap material," in the belief that such mattresses could last three or four years and cost about two dollars. Actually, the effect might have been an improvement for the men, but the proposal was buried under the administrative pressures of the war.[12]

The Army's supply system nearly collapsed during the first year of the Civil War when hordes of volunteers flocked to the colors, requiring clothes, blankets, housing, and other necessities. Since most of the volunteer units were raised by the states, there was some confusion at first about division of supply responsibilities between the states and the national government. The Quartermaster Department quickly grew into a comprehensive supervisor of all construction and supply.

The greatest immediate requirements were for clothing and blankets, especially the latter. Before the war, like other items of equipage, blankets had been bought on contract at Philadelphia. But there were not many on hand in 1861, so the quartermasters scoured the domestic and foreign markets for almost anything that would serve the purpose. Any color or weight might be purchased so long as the blankets were made of wool; jute, cotton, and grass were specifically forbidden. Supplies were insufficient, especially when state and federal quartermasters competed against one another in the same markets; too frequently the worst happened.[13]

The "worst" had the interesting side-effect of bringing into the general vocabulary a word that had formerly been restricted to the jargon of the textile and rag trades--"shoddy."[14] Shoddy technically is remanufactured cloth, particularly wool, made by separating the fibers of used yarn or cloth, then pounding them into new cloth goods in a sodden process akin to felting or, more nearly, to the manufacture of paper from wood pulp. Although is has its uses, shoddy cannot be turned into blankets suitable for military employment. But sizable quantities of shoddy blankets and even clothing were foisted off on harried quartermasters, especially during the first year of the war. Attributing much of that to profiteering, a war correspondent described the material as "a villainous compound, the refuse stuff and sweepings of the shop, pounded, rolled, glued, and smoothed to the external form and gloss of cloth, but no more like the genuine article than the shadow is to the substance." Soldiers issued blankets and clothing of shoddy, he said, found them on the first march or during the first storm "scattering to the winds in rags, or dissolving into their primitive elements of dust under the pelting rain."[15]

The distribution of shoddy blankets--not to be confused with suitable but nonstandard blankets--was probably the most scandalous supply error of the Civil War, although its incidence was greatly reduced after 1861. Regarding waterproof blankets, the Quartermaster Department could never establish a policy. At first the department was not interested, but as some states issued India-rubber blankets, the secretary of war directed that they be brought into general issue. In response, the quartermaster general ordered the purchase of waterproof blankets of several kinds of sealed fabric but specified that all have a straight slit and flaps so they could be used as ponchos, and grommet holes at 14-inch intervals around the edge so they could be joined together as shelters. India-rubber and gutta percha blankets were both used during the war, and reports from the field on their performance were in conflict. By the end of the war the department still had no single standard for waterproof blankets.[16]

The thousands of volunteers also required housing. At first, those converging on Washington were put up in public buildings and in tent camps--so far as the supply of tents permitted--in the suburbs. Almost

immediately the policy was established that no permanent structures or fortifications (the latter the responsibility of the Corps of Engineers) would be built for the duration of the conflict. By 1862 Meigs could report that after some hesitation in getting started, scores of temporary barracks and stables had been built in all the loyal states, but to the end of the war he maintained that no permanent buildings were erected.[17]

A common pattern was established quickly. The typical barracks in a training camp was a long, one-story, gabled wood building, intended to house a company of 100 men. Properly speaking, the barracks had no furniture. The men slept in bunks parallel to and built onto the long walls, in tiers of two or (more commonly) three high. The bunks averaged somewhat larger than four by six feet, were separated by partitions, and could be likened to storage bins or sleeping berths in a Pullman car. The men slept two to a bunk, and were afforded no luxury because they occupied them only during ther period of training, after which they moved to the field. Mess facilities were in separate buildings in the training camps, their signal features being long benches and tables often built as single units on the dirt floors.[18]

The construction of the training camps followed the age-old army practice: .The first men at a camp built their barracks with tools and materials supplied by the quartermasters. Civilian construction contractors were employed here and there only in later years.[19]

On April 27, 1864 the Quartermaster Department issued new standard plans for barracks, hospitals, and all manner of other buildings.[20] They were not so rudimentary as the earlier designs and reflected a growing concern for the health and comfort of the men. Barracks were now to be two stories in height, and afforded better ventilation in summer and heating (with stoves) in the winter. The ground floor provided space for officers' quarters, kitchens, and store rooms. The upper floors housed dormitories, with three-tier bunks down each side wall. But now the bunks projected perpendicularly from the walls to which they were attached, the upper and lower tiers each holding a shelf projecting into the aisle in the middle of the dormitory.

As in all previous wars, the large American army of the Civil War was not in garrison, but continuously in the field. Following tradition, the men lived in tents in the summer, then moved to wooded areas where they built their own huts for the winter, almost as in the Continental army. The chief difference during the Civil War was that the stockaded log huts were now commonly roofed with canvas tenting.[21] The wartime army remained a temporary necessity, and the government was not about to arrange for its permanent maintenance.

Furthermore, tenting was hard to come by, especially in the early days of the war. To deal with that shortage, and reflecting American tradition as well, Meigs drew a lesson from abroad:

> The French soldier uses only the shelter tent. Whenever encamped for any length of time, he is required to construct huts of small stakes, wattled with brush or straw, and thatched. The walls, for winter use, are plastered with clay mortar.
>
> Such an encampment can be constructed by the troops in eight days, and will last, with occasional repairs, for eight years. The attempt is being made to introduce this practice among our soldiers, who, from their skill in the use of the axe, and the abundance of suitable timber, can construct huts with great facility.
>
> Such camps are drier, better ventilated, and more healthy than tents during inclement weather.[22]

Whether Meigs was unaware that the customary form of housing was as traditional in the American army as in the French, it is difficult to say. In any event, in the absence of any other policy, and reacting to necessity, the American army of the Civil War did house itself that way, with the single exception of tenting routinely being substituted for thatching in hut roofs.

Supply during the Civil War was throughout an exercise in expediency and continual adjustment to changing conditions. But the scale of mobilization, and the consequently expanded requirements of army supply, forced the Quartermaster Department in the direction of more systematic regulation and careful specification of what would be supplied to the troops. That trend would continue into "peacetime" after the war, when a greatly reduced army would once again scatter over the continent in repeated wars with the Indians.

From a total strength of over one million men (mostly volunteers) in May 1865, the army stood at less than 200,000 by the end of that year; that force was cut in half by the end of 1866. In July 1866 Congress reorganized the regiments, establishing companies varying in size from 50 to 100 men each, and limited the authorized strength of the military force to 54,641. It had increased only to 56,815 by 1867.[23]

Although the Quartermaster Department, itself reduced in size, was heavily committed in selling off temporary camps, returning Confederate prisoners to their homes, and engaging in all of the activities that demobilization required, its chief missions of transporting, supplying, and housing the army continued. The peacetime army was now larger than any the department had previously served and was even more widely scattered, as it now occupied the South as well as the West. When that force almost literally burst over the West after the Civil War, the question of housing for the soldiers became rapidly critical. And an important part of that question--that of a bed for the soldier to sleep in--could not remain unanswered much longer.

It was not that it had been dodged altogether. Shortly after the end of the war, the subject of iron bedsteads was addressed, if briefly. The Johns bunks came under inquiry, but the Quartermaster Department did not even know how many it had already purchased. Given that bunk's undependable performance, and the absence of appropriations to buy more, the subject was laid to rest for a while.[24]

There was no denying that the American soldier was still the worst housed in the world, at least in comparision with his brother in Europe. As if to underscore that point, in 1863 the Army and Navy Journal printed a letter from a British soldier stationed in England, obviously aware of the impression it would make when read in the dark hovels that housed American officers and men:

> Well, each man of us here has a bed to himself, with an arm-rack behind it, and two or three pegs in the walls to hang belts, &c., upon. The bedstead is of iron, about two and a half feet wide, and hinged in the centre, so that it can be turned back in the daytime and form a seat. To each cot there is a mattress, a pillow (both stuffed with straw, and ungrateful to the bones at first, but we soon get used to that), two blankets, two sheets, and a rug. The sheets are changed every month, the blankets every three or four months.
>
> Shelves run round the room, which is also furnished with a cupboard, two tables, four forms, a plate and a basin [soup bowl] for every man, a large long-handled scrubbing-brush, a broom, small hand-scrubber, a tin-pail, a wooden pail, a wooden box with handles to contain coals, with poker, shovel, &c. The tables have moveable tops fitting upon iron stands; the cupboard doors are of iron-wire, like those of a meat-safe. The basins are made to serve the purpose of tea-cups also; knife, fork, and spoon, as I have said, are provided in the kit. Of course, I do not know that these details are the same in all barrack-rooms; but . . . I should expect to find few differences elsewhere.[25]

But there were differences elsewhere, in America, as no less a soldier than Gen. William T. Sherman knew. About the quarters of American soldiers just after the Civil War, he raged, "Surely, had the southern planters put their negroes in such hovels, a sample would, ere this, have been carried to Boston and exhibited as illustrative of the cruelty and inhumanity of the man-masters."[26]

Notes

1. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 199.

2. Ibid., 217; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 333-87. Risch offers an excellent summary of the exceedingly complex story of Quartermaster Department operations during the war. Of Meigs' performance during the Civil War, Secretary of State William H. Seward said, "Without him, the national cause must have been lost or deeply imperiled." Meigs graduated fifth in his class at West Point in 1836, served briefly in the artillery, then was called into the Corps of Engineers. In the following years he worked successively on the construction of Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania; with Robert E. Lee on navigation improvements on the Mississippi River; on the construction of Fort Delaware and the Delaware breakwater; as a staff officer with the Board of Engineers for Atlantic Coast Defenses; as superintendent of construction at Fort Wayne, Detroit; as assistant chief of engineers in Washington; and in charge of the construction of Fort Montgomery, New York. In 1853 he returned to Washington, where he took over a number of public works, including the Washington aqueduct and the wings and domes of the Capitol. In the latter project, he discarded the previous work and designed a wholly new dome frame of iron, helping to establish a style for a generation of courthouses and statehouses. At first the target of some political finagling, Meigs was appointed quartermaster general with the rank of brigadier general and served in the office until his retirement February 6, 1882. Because of his technical orientation, Meigs was the logical person to adapt army supply procurement procedures to the burgeoning industrial economy. He died January 2, 1892. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 164-65; CDAB, 661; Heitman, Historical Register, 1: 702. See also Russell F. Weigley, Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M. C. Meigs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), which emphasizes the Civil War.

3. U. S. War Department, Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861 (Philadelphia: J. G. L. Brown, 1861) cited hereafter as 1861 Regulations.

4. Ibid., nos. 122 and 1088.

5. Ibid., nos. 1191 and 1202. An adamantine candle was a hard, white candle much like those common today. The other, older types were soft, faster burning and off-white to yellowish gray in color.

6. Ibid., no. 1571.

7. U. S. War Department, Regulations for the Army of the United States 1863 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1863), cited hereafter as 1863 Regulations.

8. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 441, mentions the distribution of standard plans. The projected manual is frequently identified as an "unpublished Quartermaster manual," or parts of it as "unpublished specifications of the Civil War period" in modern research reports. See for instance Kummerow and Brown, Enlisted Barracks at Fort Snelling, and Gordon Chappell, "Barracks Furnishings of the United States Army: The Transitional Years, 1860-1890" (draft MS, 1976). But actually, some parts of the manual, such as building plans, were disseminated widely and presumably followed by Quartermaster Department officers around the country. There is also little reason to doubt that specifications for things like blankets and bedsacks were followed to the extent possible and that they are a reliable source of information for at least two decades, the 1850s and 1860s--with the notable exception of widespread deviations for purchases during the Civil War. Pertinent specifications and drawings from the unpublished manual appear in appendixes B, I, J, and K. The elements of the 1864 manual are scattered hopelessly (and, unfortunately, incompletely) throughout the QMConFile, RG92, especially at QMConFile--Barracks, Plans for, RG92. Donald Kloster of the Smithsonian Institution has worked for some years to assemble the pieces of the manual and informs me that the reassembled manual (less some parts missing perhaps forever) will be published in the next year or two.

9. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 218-19. The legislation took effect July 4, 1864.

10. General Orders of the Quartermaster Department, no. 24, Apr. 29, 1865, para. VII, in ROQMG, General Orders, Inspection Branch, January 3, 1865 to Mar. 3, 1869, RG92, NA.

11. 1861 Regulations, no. 1071.

12. D. D. Tompkins to Maj. E. S. Sibley, May 12, 1861, QMConFile--Mattresses, 1861, RG92.

13. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 357.

14. In the transferred (from the original technical textile meaning) sense of a cheap or worthless substance masquerading as something of superior quality, the OED's earliest recorded written use of "shoddy" is in an American source dated 1862. The word eventually took its new meaning back to England, but it has always had much broader and more general use in America. As a technical term in the textile industry, "shoddy was used for several decades before the Civil War on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is still current.

15. Robert Tomes, "The Fortunes of War," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 29(June 1864):227-28.

16. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 359.

17. Ibid., 440; ARQMG 1862, H. Ex. Doc. 1, 37 Cong. 3 Sess., 74. The refrain is repeated in subsequent annual reports.

18. See the plans and as-built drawings of the New Jersey Barracks in appendix B, from QMConFile--Barracks, Plans for, RG92. These reflect the prevailing practice, although in the first year or two there may have been minor variations around the country. Note as well that this pattern supports the conclusion, discussed below, that the general width of bunks increased before the Civil War. The early barracks seem to have come in two models--50 feet long with bunks in three tiers, and 100 feet long with bunks in two tiers.

19. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 441.

20. QMConFile--Barracks, Plans for, RG92. See appendix B for copies of pertinent drawings. They are probably from the "unpublished manual."

21. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 441-42.

22. ARQMG 1862, 73-74.

23. Heitman, Historical Register, 2:602-05, 626; Weigley, History of the United States Army, 262.

24. Col. William W. McKim to J. Hackett, Esq. (Johns' lawyer), Oct. 25, 1865, QMConFile--Bunks, RG92.

25. "Life in a Barrack," Army and Navy Journal, 1(Sept. 19, 1863):54. A "form" is a wooden bench, or stool.

26. Quoted in Risch, Quartermaster Support, 484.